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FEBRUARY/MARCH 2023



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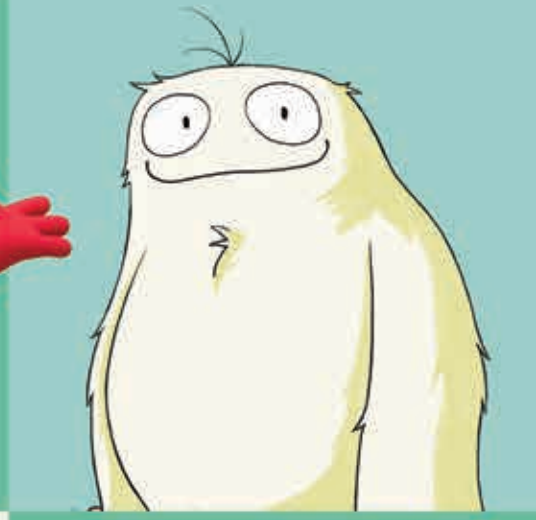
A NEW KIND OF HERO

SASHAYS HER WAY ONTO SCREENS

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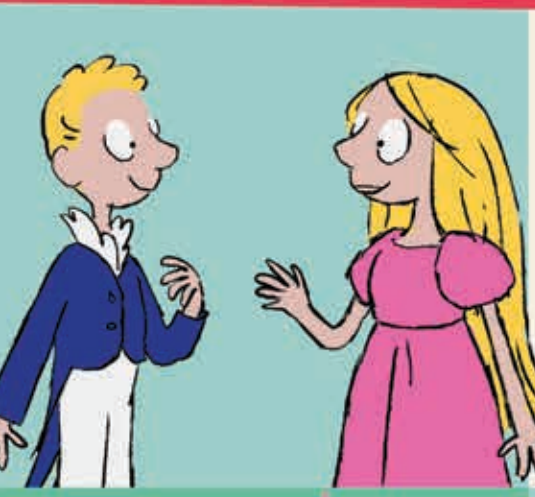



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HANGIN' TOUGH

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30 YEARS OF ANIMATION

2022
Barbie: It Takes Two
Barbie: Mermaid Power
Barbie: Epic Road Trip
The Eggventurers
Ukulele U
Team Zenko Go
CoComelon

2021
Barbie: Big City, Big Dreams
Barbie & Chelsea: The Lost Birthday
Octonauts & The Ring of Fire
Octonauts Above & Beyond
The Guava Juice Show

2020
Barbie: Princess Adventure
Barbie Vlogs
Madagascar: A Little Wild
Octonauts - Season 5
Octonauts & the Great Barrier Reef
Octonauts and the Caves of Sac Actun

2019
Luna, Chip & Inkie in the Festival of Wishes
Barbie + KIDZ BOP
Ratchet & Clank: Life of Pie
Barbie Dreamhouse Adventures: Go Team Roberts

2018
Ready2Robot
Barbie Dreamhouse Adventures
Spy Kids: Mission Critical
Elliot the Littlest Reindeer
ReBoot: The Guardian Code

2017
Barbie: Video Game Hero
Barbie Dolphin Magic

2016
Surf's Up 2: Wave Mania
Bob The Builder: Mega Machines The Movie
Barbie & Her Sisters In A Puppy Chase
Barbie: Spy Squad
Ratchet & Clank

2015
Barbie in Rock 'N Royals
Barbie in Princess Power
Bob the Builder
Open Season: Scared Silly

2014
Barbie Pearl Princess
Barbie and the Secret Door

2013
Escape from Planet Earth
Barbie: Mariposa and the Fairy Princess

2012
Max Steel: Monstrous Alliance
Barbie: The Princess and the Popstar
Barbie in A Mermaid Tale 2

2011
Barbie: Princess Charm School
Barbie: A Fairy Secret
Max Steel: Makino's Revenge

2010
Max Steel vs The Toxic Legion
Splinter Cell Conviction (Video Game Cinematics)
Driver (Video Game Cinematics)
Dead Rising 2 (Video Game Cinematics)
Barbie: A Fashion Fairytale
Barbie in A Mermaid Tale

2009
Max Steel vs the Mutant Menace
Barbie and the Three Musketeers
Barbie Presents: Thumbelina
Assassin's Creed II (Video Game Cinematics)
FEAR 2 Project Origin (Video Game Cinematics)
Ghostbusters (Video Game Cinematics)
50 Cent Blood on the Sand (Video Game Cinematics)
Shaun White Snowboarding (Video Game Cinematics)
Prototype (Video Game Cinematics)
DropShip (Video Game Cinematics)
Transformers (Video Game Cinematics)

2008
Barbie: Mariposa and Her Butterfly Fairy Friends
Barbie in A Christmas Carol
Barbie & the Diamond Castle
Max Steel: Bio Crisis
The Nutty Professor
WET (Video Game Cinematics)
Criminal (Video Game Cinematics)

2007
Max Steel: Dark Rival
Barbie as the Island Princess
Barbie at the Symphony
Barbie Fairytopia: Magic of the Rainbow
Zixx: Level Three
Stuntman Ignition (Video Game Cinematics)

2006
Max Steel: Countdown
Arthur's Missing Pal
Barbie: Fairytopia Mermaidia
Barbie in the 12 Dancing Princesses
Tony Hawk In Boom Boom Sabotage
Need For Speed Carbon (Video Game Cinematics)

2005
Max Steel: Forces of Nature
Scary Godmother: The Revenge of Jimmy
Stuart Little 3: Call of the Wild
Zixx: Level Two
Barbie and the Magic of Pegasus
Barbie: Fairytopia
Hot Wheels: AcceleRacers Ignition
Hot Wheels: AcceleRacers The Speed of Silence
Hot Wheels: AcceleRacers Breaking Point
Hot Wheels: AcceleRacers The Ultimate Race
Inspector Gadget's Biggest Caper Ever

2004
Max Steel: Endangered Species
Popeye's Voyage: The Quest for Pappy
Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper
Zixx: Level One

2003
Scary Godmother: Halloween Spooktakular
Spider-Man: The New Animated Series
Barbie of Swan Lake
Hot Wheels: Highway 35 World Race

2002
Barbie as Rapunzel

2001
Barbie in the Nutcracker
Heavy Gear
Max Steel

2000
Action Man
Casper's Haunted Christmas

1999
Weird-Ohs
Beast Machines: Transformers

1998
War Planets (Shadow Raiders)

1996
Beast Wars

1994
ReBoot

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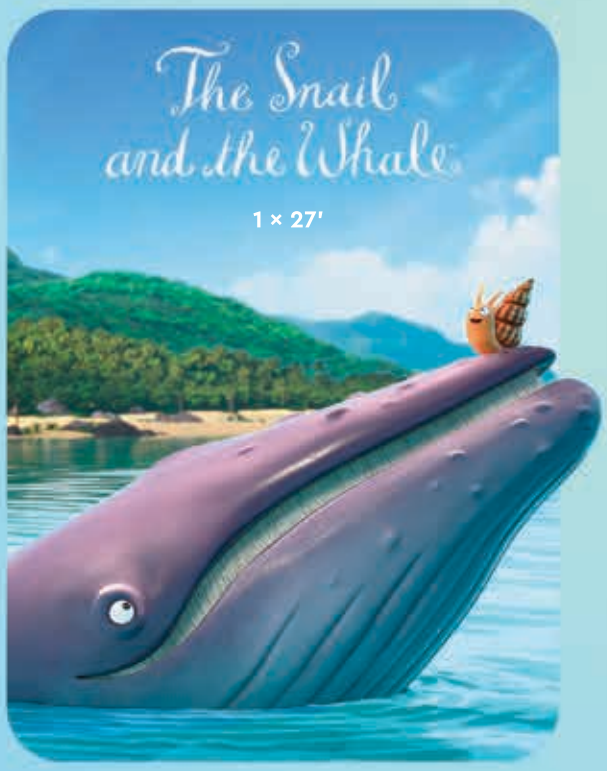
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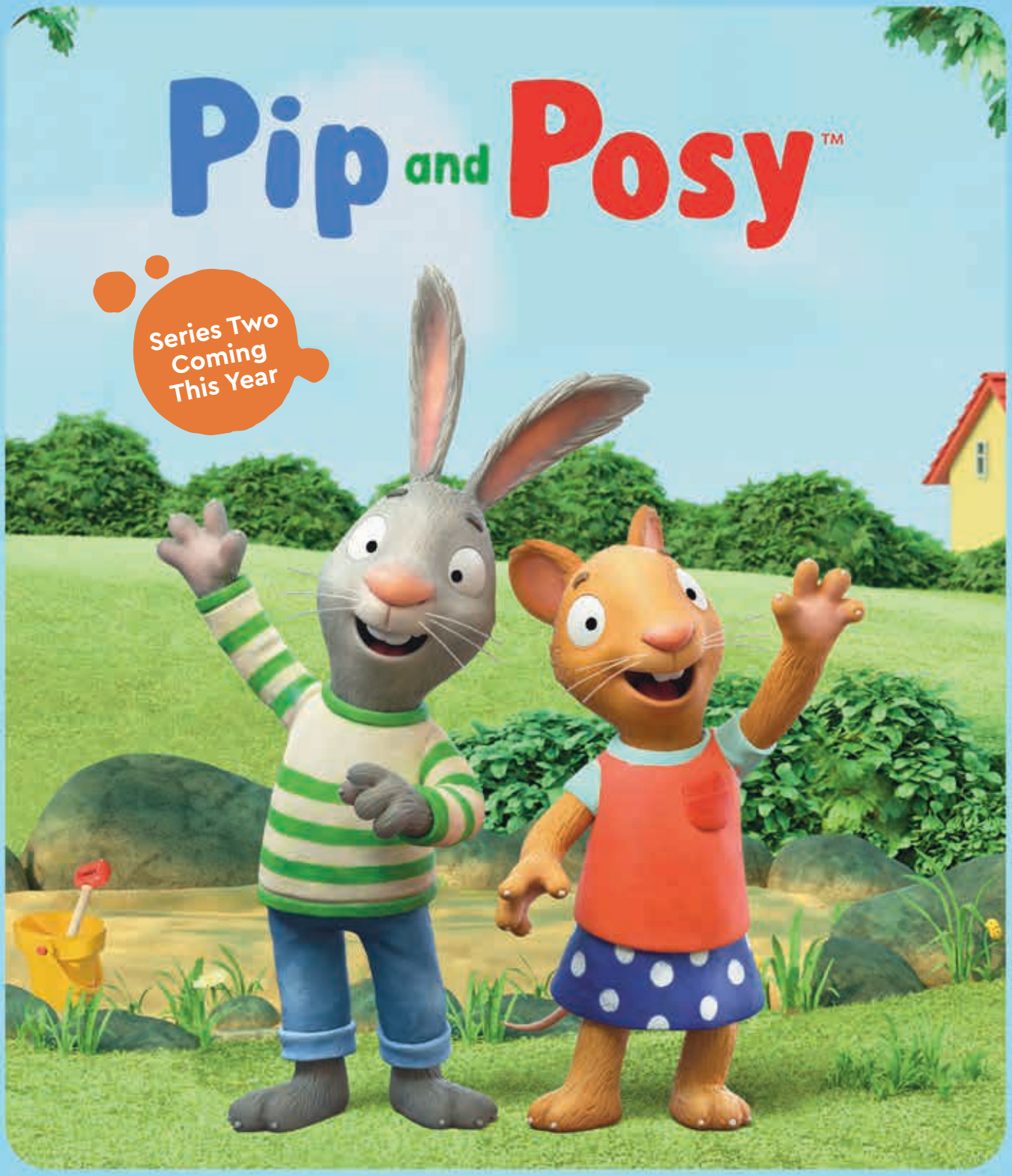


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kidscreen
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OUR SOLD COVER features an ad for eOne's *Kiya & the Kimoja Heroes*, while our editorial cover showcases *Buffalo Nanny* from China Bridge Content.





AVAILABLE 2023



We've got the beat

Did you miss us? We missed you! Our team is madly gearing up for the first full-scale Kidscreen Summit since February 2020. Yes, we saw some of you in July for our first return-to-live event. And despite the extra-hot Miami heat, most agreed that the more laid-back vibe provided a nice, soft entry back into the real world.

But there's nothing quite like the buzz and bustle of the real thing. And that's what this year's event is shaping up to be.

Our stacked keynote lineup includes industry legend Sonia Manzano (a Lifetime Emmy-winning actor, writer, speaker and producer) and iconic ballerina Misty Copeland; a sure-to-be-hilarious conversation with comedians and creators Samantha Bee and Allana Harkin; and an inspirational primer on amping up your creativity with ex-Disney head of innovation Duncan Wardle.

Sonia and Misty may seem like an unlikely pair at first glance, but they'll be discussing their pursuit of—and passion for—diversity and authenticity on and off screen. Their nuanced understanding of audience needs is a theme you'll see running through the Summit's content this year, as the industry reorients itself around the incredible power that viewers wield these days. The nuts and bolts of creating a TV concept are still the same, but getting the finished product to audiences means stepping into the Wild West. There are new players sauntering into town every week, and daily showdowns at the OK Corral, as upstarts and established outlets battle for viewers' attention.

So let's grab a seat at the Kidscreen Summit Saloon, and see how it all shakes out!

For some in the industry, this kind of chaos is déjà vu, and we wanted to explore the ins and outs of the current economic climate in this issue. Writer Gary Rusak dives into this terrain on page 78, speaking with industry leaders like 9 Story Media Group's Vince Commisso and MiMO CEO and former Nickelodeon president Cyma Zhargami about how they're navigating these tumultuous times. With experience at their backs, they point out that disruption offers a chance at self-evaluation and the opportunity to try new things. I've seen this all shake out in the Canadian kids industry over the past decade, and I think you will find our article heartening.

On a lighter note, we had a funny moment when we were wrapping up Sadhana Bharanidharan's feature exploring what kind of content is resonating with tweens/teens (page 29). Most agree that teens are a tough crowd for the traditional TV format, but just as we were signing off on this story, mystery/drama/comedy series *Wednesday* exploded and became one of Netflix's all-time most popular shows, capturing an all-ages cultural zeitgeist that we haven't seen in years.

Sure, the ingredients of that show are unique—star director, beloved IP, charismatic breakout star. (Plus, the genius TikTok play that saw Wednesday's high school dance moves spark a viral frenzy.) But what a wonderful business this is! One minute, you think the kids have gone to 10-second videos and are never coming back. And the next, they're happily crowded onto the family couch bingeing HOUR-LONG episodes of a "regular" show with characters their parents grew up watching.

I look forward to seeing you around at the InterContinental Miami with a *Wednesday* of your own burning a hole in your pocket, and wish you the best of luck pitching it. The screens may change, and so may the outlets, but great storytelling—and kooky dancing!—will always prevail.

—Katie Bailey

kidscreen

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SVP & PUBLISHER
Jocelyn Christie jchristie@brunico.com

EDITORIAL
EDITOR & CONTENT DIRECTOR
Katie Bailey kbailey@brunico.com

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Janet Lees jlees@brunico.com

FEATURES & SPECIAL PROJECTS EDITOR
Jeremy Dickson jdickson@brunico.com

NEWS EDITOR
Ryan Tuchow rtuchow@brunico.com

STAFF WRITERS
Sadhana Bharanidharan sbharanidharan@brunico.com
Andrea Hernandez ahernandez@brunico.com
Cole Watson cwatson@brunico.com

CONTRIBUTORS
Abbie Burrus, Christopher Byrne, Richard Goldsmith, David Kleeman, David Levine, Peter Robinson, Gary Rusak, Lauren Taylor, Yalda Uhls

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & ADVERTISING SALES
+1-416-408-2300 or 1-800-KID-4512 (toll-free)

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
Maggie Wilkins mwilkins@brunico.com

ACCOUNT MANAGER
Lia Minquini lminquini@brunico.com

CREATIVE
ART DIRECTOR
Taylee Buttigieg tbuttigieg@brunico.com

AUDIENCE SERVICES
DATA INTEGRITY & CUSTOMER SUPPORT SUPERVISOR
Christine McNalley cmcnalley@brunico.com

CORPORATE
PRESIDENT & CEO
Russell Goldstein rgoldstein@brunico.com

EVP & EDITORIAL DIRECTOR
Mary Maddever mmaddever@brunico.com

SVP & REALSCREEN PUBLISHER
Claire Macdonald cmacdonald@brunico.com

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THE LIST

10 things on our radar this month



1 Pokémon's new chapter

It's the end of an era. After 25 years and more than 1,200 mainline episodes, The Pokémon Company is saying farewell to its anime franchise's iconic heroes Ash Ketchum and Pikachu. The show's 25th season draws to a close internationally in March, and a new 2D-animated series will take its place in April, with a new pair of protagonists ready to take the reins. It's a risky move to retire a brand's mascot characters, but like many of its monsters, the Pokémon IP appears ready to evolve. Besides the new anime, Pokémon is jumping into the unscripted space by way of a new live-action series based on its popular trading card game. And the demand for Pokémon cards in 2022 was massive, driving the company to increase production by 27% and print more than nine billion cards in its fiscal year. Meanwhile, the franchise's latest video game entries, *Pokémon Scarlet* and *Pokémon Violet*, became the fastest-selling titles on any Nintendo console in November 2022, with the 9th generation games selling more than 10 million copies worldwide within 72 hours of their release. Will Pokémon's next chapter see that kind of success? Time will tell.



6

Three, two, one...go!

Nintendo's classic *Mario Kart* racing game will leave the screen to become a 3D attraction in a new interactive Mushroom Kingdom world that's opening at Universal Studios Hollywood. And that's not all—on April 7, Nintendo will also release a movie featuring the franchise's star character in North America.



7

Cameo says hello to kids

Cameo has set its sights on the kids sector, launching a new service with major brands. The personalized messaging platform began offering videos for kids featuring YouTuber Blippi in 2019, and has since added Universal's *The Boss Baby*, as well as Moonbug's animated version of Blippi and its Cocomelon characters.



2 Bye-bye big budgets?

After a year of robust investment in new shows and movies, the global content spend is set to rise by just 2% in 2023, according to research firm Ampere—the smallest year-over-year growth in more than a decade. With decreased ad revenue and consumers spending less on entertainment, the shift could make it harder for producers to get shows made.



3 Union drive

On January 18, Nickelodeon officially agreed to recognize US labor org The Animation Guild (TAG) as the bargaining rep for 177 of its studios' production workers—the largest group of production workers ever to organize with TAG. In December, the group had voted to unionize for higher wages and more affordable healthcare, and is now set to negotiate its first union contract.



4 FTC fines

After years of news about Google and YouTube paying out US$170 million to the FTC for allegedly violating children's privacy, more companies are being slapped with major FTC fines. In December, *Fortnite*-maker Epic paid out US$500 million to settle allegations that it violated COPPA. As regulations change, will companies get better at protecting kids' privacy, or will the fines keep coming?



5 United for Ukraine

The industry continues to come together for Ukraine nearly a year after Russia's invasion began. Sesame Workshop issued a call for live-action shorts to help displaced Ukrainian kids celebrate their culture; WildBrain saved the Ukrainian animated series *Brave Bunnies* by acquiring the IP; and parents separated from their children can now read them bedtime stories via audiobook app *Better Time Stories*.



8 Theatrical recovery

Theatrical releases are on the upswing—despite not reaching pre-pandemic levels, last year's global box-office take increased by 27% year over year to US$26 billion, according to Gower Street Analytics. The momentum for 2023 looks promising, as studios figure out how to bring kids back to the big screen.



9 All eyes on AI

All the hype about ChatGPT and the growing awareness of AI's benefits as an educational tool have the industry buzzing about what artificial intelligence could mean for kids. Between figuring out what that will look like, and what kids will want to interact with, AI will likely have a life of its own for at least a little while.



10 In the groove

To help prodcos navigate the complex music business, Paris-based 440Hz has launched a dedicated division to simplify everything from song clearance to talent recruitment. With the rise of music-centric kids content like TeamTO's *Behind the Beats* and PopCult's *Disney Hits Podcast*, it's good timing!



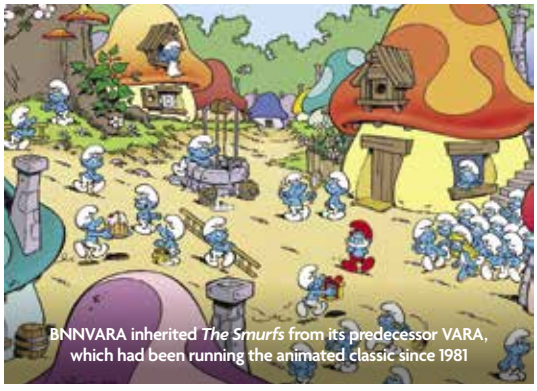
Maja Braun has been in charge of BNNVARA's kids content since last May



Children for Children was BNNVARA's only kids program until 2021



Skyhigh TV created and produces *Last Family Standing* for BNNVARA, in which families try to survive the Croatian wilderness



BNNVARA inherited *The Smurfs* from its predecessor VARA, which had been running the animated classic since 1981

THE HOOKUP

Kidscreen checks in with new, established and evolving kids content buyers to find out what they're looking for right now. For more of this type of intel, check out our *Global Pitch Guide* at kidscreen.com.

BY: ANDREA HERNANDEZ

Meet BNNVARA! The Dutch public broadcaster's kids division is only a year old, but with a strong vision and a keen understanding of what domestic viewers want, it's looking to establish a multi-generational core audience.

Established in the aftermath of a 2014 merger between Dutch public broadcasting associations BNN and VARA, BNNVARA has had to learn the kids content business almost from scratch, says Maja Braun, head of youth and human interest, and the channel's lead commissioner of kids content.

Prior to 2021, BNNVARA's only kids programming title was *Kinderen voor Kinderen (Children for Children)*, an annual holiday music special featuring the pubcaster's own choir and celebrity guests. The kids unit was established to broaden BNNVARA's audience, optimize co-viewing opportunities and build a legacy of viewers, says Braun. "We want to capture kids' attention from an early age and have them grow [up] as our portfolio expands," she says. "We also want adults who watch our programs to be able to enjoy the new kids offerings with their children."

What is BNNVARA looking for?

Targeting kids ages seven and up, BNNVARA's lineup is currently focused on the factual and reality genres, featuring 12 animated and live-action series and movies. The channel also aims to spotlight tough issues like the pandemic, smoking and climate change in content tailored for tween/teen audiences.

Going forward, the team is looking to add shows—preferably live-action ones—that inform kids about the real world in an entertaining way and help them build their personal identities. "That's what kids prefer now," Braun notes.

BNNVARA is in the market for content that runs 15 minutes or longer, with a minimum of six episodes for volume. It's also looking to develop and co-produce early-stage concepts.

Recent kids content moves

One of BNNVARA's latest co-pro projects for younger viewers is *Dome 16*, an animated series with Norway's Tordenfilm and the Netherlands' Big Blue about two young people from different climate zones in the same city who fall in love. Recent acquisitions include live-action series *Teenage Boss* from NRK, featuring a group of teenagers learning to manage money in a playful and fun way by taking control of their parents' finances.

Braun is confident about the channel's position in the market, thanks to stand-out content and a unique programming brand that "treats kids like adults" and doesn't shy away from major issues. "The mix of tough topics and fun is what has made BNNVARA's content special in the Dutch industry," she says.

Future plans

Braun's team is currently working on developing a new series that will challenge kids to come up with solutions to various problems the country faces, such as pollution and traffic congestion. The show will visit a different school each week to outline a tricky issue and ask kids to brainstorm ideas to address it. k





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SINKING SHIP ENTERTAINMENT



BIG GIG Nerissa Holder Hall

THE BIG GIG: Head of franchise at web-first animation studio Invisible Universe

PREVIOUSLY: Senior director of content strategy for Noggin (Nickelodeon's learning app)

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: Early in her career, Hall taught high school English and worked as a production assistant on film sets in New York. She saw an opportunity to combine these two loves in the world of kids media, and met with Mariana Díaz-Wionczek, head of research on Nick's *Dora the Explorer*. Impressed, Diaz-Wionczek hired Hall on the spot as a research coordinator for the show.

FUTURE FOCUS: Hall also has an entrepreneurial bent—she established a social platform for teen girls called CleverHive in 2008 (it closed in 2013), and a direct-to-consumer publishing company called Mirror Mirror Books in 2021. Throughout her career, she has been driven by a curiosity to explore kids' ever-changing preferences.

"I wanted to see what was new and next—where kids were going to be in the future," she explains. That's why Invisible Universe, with its web-first approach to IP incubation, captured her interest. "They are thinking now about what we'll be doing in the future."

FEEDBACK LOOP: For today's kids, abundance of choice makes for a very noisy content landscape. "Part of what every franchise is working for is visibility and discoverability," says Hall.

One of the lasting lessons she learned at Nickelodeon was the importance of knowing specifically what kids like—something Invisible Universe has already built into its development process. "With characters that are born on the internet, we understand what audiences find resonant from the very beginning."

FINDING THE BLUEPRINT: In her role as head of franchise, Hall is responsible for commercializing and expanding Invisible Universe's IPs onto new platforms. She is particularly excited about upcoming plans for Qai Qai, a popular brand that was developed in partnership with tennis star Serena Williams.

Based on a doll belonging to Williams' daughter, the character has built up an online fandom of more than four million followers on Instagram and TikTok. But TikToks can only fit so much. Next up, Hall says Qai Qai audiences can expect to get a more in-depth look at the character in longer-format content, including a series that's currently in development. —Sadhana Bharanidharan

Know your audience

BY: JIM BENTON





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Zigazoo wants you!

With two million learning-hungry kids on board, the social media platform is looking to build up its micro-monetization program.

BY: RYAN TUCHOW

Burgeoning social media platform Zigazoo is looking to become the first place kids brand owners go to start building an audience.

The platform launched in 2020 with an MO that's all about letting kids ages six to 12 create short videos in which they answer questions, complete challenges or share their passions. In the last year, major players including Nickelodeon, Penguin Random House and NBA have used Zigazoo to interact with kids, with branded executions like posting videos, posing fun questions and giving Zigazooers challenges to complete in order to earn "Zigabucks" (an in-game currency).

Two years and two million users into its journey, Zigazoo is set to move into a second phase. Heading into 2023, the platform is aiming to make it easier for all creators to engage with kids and monetize their content, says CEO Zak Ringelstein. In Q1, Zigazoo will expand the feature that currently lets a limited number of major brands issue challenges (anything from making a simple craft to sharing how they're feeling) to almost all of its users, including indies and kid creators—opening the door for any creator to reach kids from their first moments on the platform.

The company will also shift its licensing strategy outside the app for the first time, expanding from digital stickers and NFTs to physical consumer products. The effort will be led by Ashley Mady, Zigazoo's first president of consumer products and a former Basic Fun! and Jakks Pacific exec.

This new strategy to increase monetization opportunities on the platform will involve supporting the efforts of individual kid creators, as well as small businesses and brands. "Some of the most popular brands on the platform are independent creators who are teaching kids and encouraging them to be creative," says Ringelstein. "It's hard to break through on other platforms, but we're working to make it easier for [those] creators to reach real kids and get real kid responses."

Zigazoo's users are, for the most part, young kids who want to learn. And this curated audience—along with a platform that manages privacy, moderation and publishing—makes it easy for creators to focus solely on making content, says Ashok Kamal, co-founder of California-based School of Rap, which launched its Pod Squad brand on Zigazoo (pictured). Pod Squad features three orca whales who teach kids about topics such as geography, animals and language through rap music.

For Kamal, platforms like YouTube and TikTok are a "red ocean"—a space crowded with brands fighting for eyeballs. By contrast, Zigazoo is still a blue ocean, clear of the crowds and with lots of room to grow, he says.

The company launched its first videos on Zigazoo in December 2021 and now has around 50,000 followers—without any paid marketing or pay-to-play features. "Without paying on a platform like YouTube, we'll get lost in the red ocean without a paddle," says Kamal. "So we're not going to be frustrated by the Herculean effort of trying to get found on [YouTube]. Instead, we'll focus on Zigazoo, where we can interact with kids and learn what they want to see." k



208x5'

SIMON SUPER RABBIT

NEW SEASON!



Contact: Eric Garnet - eric.garnet@go-n.fr - https://www.go-n.fr/

GO-N INTERNATIONAL

Who let the robot dog out?

A customizable look, a suite of cool features and an accessible price point are all part of WowWee's strategy to re-enter the robot market with a bite that matches its bark.

BY: RYAN TUCHOW



WowWee is ratcheting up its robot game with a new toy that can be personalized for each kid who plays with it. Launching in October 2023, Dog-E aims to stand out from the pack with customizable features/sounds and a tail that can move and display text. Kids will be able to change the look, bark and personality of their dog through a free app.

The goal with Dog-E is to give kids a toy that they can make their own (even if they have to share it with siblings). As each child plays with the bot for the first time, sensors automatically change its color and appearance.

Parents can save multiple profiles on the app, so even kids from the same family will have totally different experiences on the same Dog-E, says Sydney Wiseman, WowWee's VP of brand development and creative strategy.

"We're gamifying the dog-keeping experience," she explains. "We're also getting back into robots because kids are talking more about tech now and making it a bigger part of their play."

The app keeps kids updated on how happy their dog is feeling, and if it needs to poop or play. There are also games kids can play to solve problems like ridding their dog of fleas. Kids can even dole out treats to Dog-E from



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the app, which will change the dog's color and trigger a variety of reactions.

WowWee is also tapping into coding and STEM skill-building by offering basic programming options in the form of commands such as, "If I clap twice, you bark once." Dog-E has sensors that can identify sounds and touch, so it can fully engage with kids.

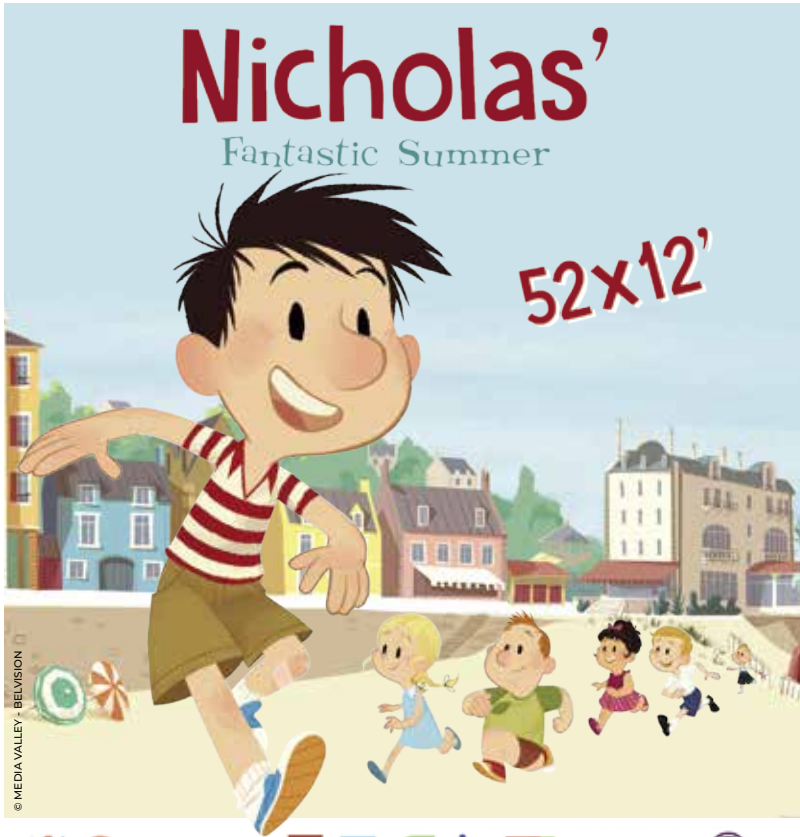
Launching with an aggressive suggested retail price of just US$79.99, this is WowWee's first robotic toy since CHiP—also a dog—was released in 2016. This early effort was priced at US$200, and in a market rife with consoles and tablets, sales soon slowed.

Wowee has since shifted away from the category and has scored hits over the past few years with brands like Fingerlings (animatronic toys that attach to kids' fingers) and Twilight Daycare dolls. The toyco sees this as the perfect time to re-enter the entertainment robot market, which analysts are predicting will grow substantially in the near future.

The value of the category is expected to hit US$60 billion by 2029 (up from US$11 billion in 2021), driven by a growing demand for animatronics and parents increasingly viewing robots as educational tools, according to Data Bridge Market Research. k

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For more information contact
Alexandra.McGrail@bbc.com

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Big Bets for 2023

We asked: What's the most exciting opportunity in your sector this year?



"We see emerging metaverse platforms as *the* Wild West opportunity of the year. Technologies are catching up to audiences' inherent desire to be more active and collaborative participants with others. We won't be surprised when some wildly creative franchises emerge as these new platforms grow."

Kane Lee
Head of Content
Baobab Studios



"The big opportunity for 2023 lies in innovative storytelling with newer formats to target various age groups, [especially] taking into account the rise in co-viewing. I think we will see more content creators strengthening franchises with newer extensions to existing content that won't just be limited to the screen.

Leena Lele Dutta
Head of Business
Sony YAY!



"We see opportunity to continue building on the accessibility of our content—creating impactful media that meets kids where they are. We are focusing on new formats, including shorts, games and podcasts designed for intergenerational learning and play, to meet the evolving needs of our audiences."

Abby Jenkins
Senior Director, Content
PBS KIDS



"At Noggin, we know that the kids media market is crowded, and that, too often, it lacks educational intention. It is critical that we offer families a joyful and connected experience for interactive content that entertains and also promotes curiosity, confidence and a love of learning."

Michael Levine
SVP, Learning & Impact
Noggin

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Bardel is pleased to announce the addition of two top industry figures joining the Bardel executive team.

Kevin Farrell, Bardel's VP of Production, holds 14 years of experience across multiple global kids and family animated TV franchises. Kevin began his career as a Production Accountant before making the transition into the world of Production on high-profile series for clients such as Disney, Amazon, and BBC including multiple Emmy winning series.

Arash Roudafshan, VP of Information Technology, provides strategic oversight of the technical operations and vision for the company's global network. With over 20 years of strong leadership experience in the Information Technology field, and 15 years of production technology experience, Arash understands the complexity of the production pipeline and enterprise standards of the modern animation industry.

"It is a privilege to add Kevin and Arash to our team, building on the strength of Bardel's continued success."
— Tina Chow, CEO, Bardel Entertainment.

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Growing Pains: Targeting today's teens

The 12 to 17 demo remains as elusive as ever, but there's a lot more than tumbleweed blowing in the territory occupied by this transitioning audience group these days.

BY: SADHANA BHARANIDHARAN

It has never been easy to capture the attention of teens. It's not that they don't like screens—they actually love them the most. In fact, roughly half (46%) of the US teen population (ages 13 to 17) says they're online constantly, according to a Pew Research survey that was released in August.

But getting them to watch your content there is another matter.

"We've lost the 13- to 16-year-old viewers to YouTube and TikTok," says David Michel, president and co-founder of French prodco Cottonwood Media. "But the tween audience is kind of split between TV and social platforms. We haven't lost them entirely."

Cottonwood is leaning into this opportunity with new live-action titles like *Theodosia* (ZDF) and *Circuit Breakers* (Apple TV+). And Michel says there is more freedom today for ambitious tween content beyond the safe zone of sitcoms.

But with subscriber growth plateauing, streamers may need to bet on content that is appealing to both groups on a mass scale. And for some, the answer to this challenge may be found in "clean teen" programming.

"Clean teen" content on the rise

Kindle Entertainment's teen thriller *The A List* (2018) succeeded because it worked on multiple levels, acknowledging the disappearing line between older tween and teen audiences, says co-founder and managing director Melanie Stokes.



See-Saw Films' breakout hit *Heartstopper* started as a young creator's web comic, giving it authenticity and a built-in following at launch—and other producers are looking to emulate this successful formula

"Younger teens loved it because it was sort of risqué and aspirational, while older teens liked it for the comfort factor of the familiar," including friendship dynamics and nostalgic school settings. It's a tricky balance that is immensely rewarding when done right.

Following Kindle's acquisition by Banijay Kids & Family last fall, the prodco has been responding to "clean teen" content demand from platforms like Freeform and Amazon Freevee, and early conversations are promising. "They're looking for [programming] that's softer YA, but also not as edgy as *Euphoria*," says Stokes. The ongoing expansion of free services and cheaper AVOD tiers could also help give streamers a much-needed leg up to reach teens and compete with the likes of YouTube and other web platforms, she predicts.

ABC Australia kickstarted its 2023 with the launch of new horror/comedy series *Crazy Fun Park* (10 x 30 minutes) in an effort to appeal to a wider teen audience. The show's protagonist is an introverted high-schooler who's mourning the loss of his best friend—until he meets his buddy's ghost at an abandoned theme park. "We really wanted a show about that bittersweet and tender friendship between boys, showing them in a more complex manner than we often see," says Libbie Doherty, head of children's at the Australian pubcaster.

Like most broadcasters, Doherty acknowledges the challenge of getting teens to tune in, but adds that it doesn't mean they should be ignored. Instead, she advises programming buyers to look for content that caters to the tricky zone between kids and adults, while being careful not to fall into the pigeonholing trap. "We have to honor the fact that teens are very much the curators of their own experience."

Stokes says Netflix has done a great job of finding content that primarily centers on adolescent characters, while also resonating with a broader audience. The streamer's most recent hit along these lines is teen-skewing series *Wednesday*, which debuted in December and quickly became its third most-viewed English-language series of all time.

Then there's pop-culture juggernaut *Stranger Things*—KidsKnowBest research shows that *Stranger Things* is the most favorite show among 12- to 16-year-olds in the US and UK.

And last year's breakout hit *Heartstopper* from See-Saw Films, which centers on a gay teen love story, is also a success story. The eight x 30-minute series hit Netflix's top 10 in more than 50 countries, and was greenlit for two more seasons just a month after its debut. *Heartstopper* is adapted from the same-name web comic by Alice Oseman, who was just 22 when it was first published in 2016.

ABC Australia's Doherty says her team also tries to source teen projects from younger creatives, since they are closer to the action and authenticity of life at that age. And that means depicting what a teen is actually going through—not simply an adult's view of what a teen is going through.

"It's a subtle difference, but an important one," says Doherty. "[With] storytelling for this age group, it's just not going to work if you don't have people with lived experience in the writers room and on the production team, adding that nuance and texture."

Mining social media

Another factor working for *Heartstopper* is its origins as a web comic, which gave it a built-in following at launch.

Having a successful social or digital presence is increasingly key. So ABC Australia is building one for its upcoming one-hour special *The Disposables*, a gritty story about a 16-year-old refugee in Sydney whose father goes missing. The one-hour ABC ME and ABC iview broadcast will also be broken down into a TikTok series (30 x two minutes) to satisfy the vertical, bite-size preferences of today's teens. And it features footage that looks like it was recorded on a phone, giving it an experimental vibe in both form and duration.

Social media is a resource for creatives working to target tweens, too. "We create social media accounts for our shows, and these platforms help us gauge audience reactions to story twists," notes Cottonwood's Michel. "We often get DMs with really strong opinions [from young fans under parental supervision]."

Youth media researcher Mary Madden says that although the two poles of the 12 to 17 demo differ in many ways, they also have overlapping preferences due to their shared familiarity with smartphones and social media.

A senior fellow at Sesame Workshop's Joan Ganz Cooney Center, Madden co-authored the Center's 2021 study *The Missing Middle*, which drew from interviews with 50 respondents (ages 10 to 17) in the US



Teen-skewing series *Wednesday* debuted in December and quickly became Netflix's third most-viewed English-language series of all time



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to identify public media gaps in teen/tween offerings. She notes the potential of tools like transmedia storytelling to capture this base, and sees opportunity in narratives and characters with which audiences can engage across platforms. This drives speculation about outcomes, cultivates online fandom, and gives teens a sense of autonomy when they're trusted to figure things out.

"You can see it being done effectively in the music industry—for example, Taylor Swift is known for dropping hints and puzzles [across social media] for her fans," says Madden.

The next chapter

Canada (the land of *Degrassi*) may be the litmus test for clean teen content's potential. A.J. Trauth, marblemedia's VP of kids, is optimistic that a teen resurgence is on the horizon. Last year, the Toronto-based prodco tapped into digital-first funding to launch its web series *Lady Ada's Secret Society* for ages nine to 15. Now it's setting its sights on the wider teen base.

Based on encouraging input from a commissioning streamer, marblemedia aged up its target demo for two upcoming projects, now squarely aiming for 12- to 17-year-olds. The first is a comedy series that was initially planned for the eight to 12 set, but pivoted up to avoid watering down the humor.

And the second show, based on a horror book franchise, reset its target demo to retain more of the source material's frightening bits. "A few chapters of those books are honestly scary—we were debating if we could depict that on screen for six to 11s. So we decided to age up and lean into the scary."



Targeted at a wide teen audience, ABC Australia's new horror/comedy series *Crazy Fun Park* tackles complex issues like grief and male friendship



French prodco Cottonwood is catering to the demand for more sophisticated tween content with live-action titles like *Theodosia*

Now marblemedia is actively hunting for new IPs and books to option for teen projects. "It's liberating," Trauth says. "Everything we do is family-appropriate, but in terms of the scares, jokes and maturity of certain relationships we're depicting, we can push the envelope a bit more with the 12 to 17 demo."

Canadian media company Corus struck a deal last fall with Dominion of Drama in the UK to tap into the youth-whispering prowess of its founder, author and producer Jeff Norton. Together, they've established a new entity, Waterside Studios, that will invest in teen-skewing book adaptations with the goal of producing high-quality, live-action programming for youth.

While Corus has traditionally looked at its demo-specific branded channels first and the international marketplace second, Norton says the strategy with Waterside will be global—and YA-focused. "Lots of buyers and commissioners outside of Canada are incredibly hungry for content," he says with enthusiasm, noting that the company has a number of books under option and in development.

And just like a savvy parent, Corus even plans to give Waterside the space and trust to go out into the world on its own. Waterside can tap into the production/distribution capabilities of Corus's Nelvana or work with other partners for more adult-skewing fare.

The label's first project will be a miniseries called *The Last Wish of Sasha Cade*, which is about a teen girl who loses her best friend to cancer. Based on the 2018 book of the same name by Cheyanne Young, this miniseries will start production later this year.

Complex narratives such as this must be balanced with optimism—a hallmark of clean teen content that sets it apart from darker YA shows, notes Norton. "You have to remember that, to a teenager, life is already dystopian fiction."

Norton visited more than 500 schools over the past few years to speak to teens, and identified two needs: relatability and escapism. "There's a desire to have anything from what I call armchair travel to the full-on escapism of fantasy or sci-fi," he says. "But there's also a yearning [among teens] to see themselves and their day-to-day lives on screen."

For ABC Australia's Doherty, the takeaway is simple: "Teens are a challenging audience. But once you get them, it's well worth the effort."

SALES ENQUIRIES: sales@seriouskids.com

60 X 5’



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13 X 11’
or 6 X 26’



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104 X 11’



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Saying gay on screen

Producer and LGBTQ+ advocate David Levine argues that while representation on screen has improved, we can do better—especially for six to 11s.

BY: DAVID LEVINE

Inclusion and LGBTQ+ representation in kids content has been on the rise over the past number of years. However, there are strong cultural headwinds fighting against this direction.

In the US, Florida's "Don't Say Gay or Trans" bill went into effect July 1, 2022, making conversation around LGBTQ+ issues in schools illegal—with teachers and schools potentially liable for any breaches of the law. Meanwhile, in the UK, public discourse around trans rights has become vitriolic, with hate crimes targeting transgender people increasing by 56% between 2021 and 2022, according to the UK Home Office.

What does this mean for us as an industry with the unique and special privilege of communicating directly with children? It's my opinion that this levels up our responsibility to celebrate, discuss and showcase the examples of brave companies and their efforts to present a more inclusive world on screen and fill the gaps where others are falling short.

LGBTQ+ inclusion is not only the right thing to do—it works. IP owners are seeing success with inclusive content, as audience attitudes shift and younger viewers' expectations change.

It's indisputable that global attitudes and audiences have evolved significantly when it comes to LGBTQ+ acceptance. The non-partisan Pew Research Center's 2020 report showed that acceptance of homosexuality had increased between 2002 and 2019 in most of the nations that were polled.

It also showed that LGBTQ+ acceptance had risen from 51% to 72% in the US, and from 74% to 86% in the UK. In virtually every country, younger generations appear to be more accepting than older generations. For example, in South Korea, the Pew research showed that 79% of 18- to 29-year-olds were OK with homosexuality, versus only 23% of those over the age of 50. And according to a February 2022 Gallup poll in the US, 21% of respondents between ages 18 and 24 said they identify as LGBTQ+.

This means that a significant portion of the next generation of young parents will either support or be part of the LGBTQ+ community. And they'll almost certainly instill values of acceptance and allyship in their kids.

On screen, we're already seeing this reflected in successful shows like Netflix's *Heartstopper*, whose joyful storytelling and LGTBQ+ themes have attracted a massive global audience and led to a season-two pickup. The High School Musical franchise finally came out of the closet on Disney+ in 2019, introducing a bisexual character, a gay relationship and an LGBTQ+ love song.

On the preschool front, it's about showing families of different configurations. Gay parents were introduced in *Peppa Pig, Chip and Potato, Gecko's Garage* and more. Nick's iconic Blue's Clues franchise even featured a special *Pride Parade Sing Along* video on YouTube in 2021, showcasing the different parts of the queer community.

But where we can really improve is in the six-to-11 space, a critical age range for self-discovery that's greatly affected by bills like the one in Florida. Animated series *Legend of Korra* and *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* both had lesbian main characters—but their sexuality was only revealed in the final episodes. And Disney's *The Owl House* featured the company's first-ever bisexual lead character, but the show was cancelled after two seasons, despite having 28 times audience demand of an average series in 2022, according to Parrot Analytics. Other popular series with LGBTQ+ characters and above-average audience numbers in 2022 include *Steven Universe* (31 times), *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* (29 times) and *Dead End: Paranormal Park* (five times).

Representation matters. It's important to our audience. Acceptance continues to grow globally, and successful examples abound across age demos, genres and companies both large and small. But there's room to improve. Let's keep doing more, doing it better, and safeguarding our special space.

DAVID LEVINE is an executive producer and the founder of Lightboat Media. He advises companies on content strategies in the digital world, and produces content championing LGBTQ+ voices and themes.

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In Lopii's *Dream It To Be It*, kids of all abilities participate in a wide range of jobs and activities

Working it out

Is there value in career-focused content for kids ages four to eight? The teams behind a podcast, a live-actioner and an animated series make their case.

BY: SADHANA BHARANIDHARAN

It's a question that kids get asked all the time: What do you want to be when you grow up? But here's one for the adults: What's the right age for kids to begin exploring career development content?

For some producers, buyers and researchers, the answer is the bridge audience of four- to eight-year-olds. But career 101 for this age group becomes something of a balancing act, drawing on the playfulness of preschool content and the agency of older-skewing fare.

That was certainly the experience of Madrid-based app-maker Lingokids, which launched an educational podcast called *Growin' Up* (30 x 15 minutes) in September last year. It was new territory for the company after focusing on short stories and music in its previous titles.

In each episode of *Growin' Up*, host Emily Calandrelli provides a crash course on the ins and outs of a particular job, from traditional occupations like teaching, to modern ones like video game design. The challenge was to create a narrative that engages young kids who are more attuned to fiction.

"For kids podcasts, in general, one of the challenges is how to retain the audience's attention if it's not pure storytelling," notes Olga Klepova, Lingokids' senior podcasts and partnerships manager. To achieve this, each episode switches through a smorgasbord of styles, including catchy jingles, interviews with real-life professionals, thought-provoking questions (Can you become an actor if you're shy?), jokes and practical advice.

To maintain a kid-friendly vibe, Klepova says the practical component is geared toward skills and hobbies, rather than focusing purely on career as a concept.

Toronto's Lopii Productions is also breaking into the career content category with its upcoming live-actioner *Dream It To Be It* (21 x seven minutes), which sees kids meeting professionals, asking questions and even trying out tasks on the job.

"The best kind of learning—and the best kind of TV—allows kids to participate and do," says Lopii co-founder Rennata Lopez. "We thought it would be great to give [the six-to-nine demo] a show where they could actually see kids their age getting the chance to explore and learn more about possible careers."

Greenlit last year by Canadian pubcasters TVOKids and Knowledge Kids, the docuseries



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also represents people with disabilities. "Many of our guests and children—along with our teen host, Tai Young—have disabilities, and we found that it really didn't make a difference to our dreamers. They never questioned if anyone had the ability to do anything," Lopez explains.

The Lopii team attended a Toronto Metropolitan University Children's Media Lab event in March 2021 where presenters from Canadian rehabilitation hospital Holland Bloorview explained how kids with disabilities don't see themselves represented accurately, Lopez recalls. The same day, the prodco signed a pledge to do its part to improve this particular brand of representation as part of the hospital's Dear Everybody campaign against ableism.

"When we were pitched *Dream It To Be It*, we saw an opportunity to expand our offering of career-focused programming," says TVOKids executive producer Kirsten Hurd. "We're also thrilled to feature kids of all abilities participating in a wide range of jobs and activities."

The regional public broadcaster has launched other career-focused series in recent years, including *When I Grow Up* and *Gabby's Farm*. Hurd predicts that demand for such content is poised to grow. "With the proliferation of new high-tech jobs and industries, I can see broadcasters looking for more content that helps kids explore new possibilities."

However, Lingokids' Klepova advises producers to "mind the [generation] gap" when creating co-viewing (or co-listening) content, because adults might not be hip to the kids'... lingo. "With new types of jobs related to technology that have emerged, the vocabulary around them has not been fully adopted by today's grown-ups."

Estimates of how many new careers will materialize by the time today's elementary students enter the workforce are varied, but Twin Cities PBS (TPT) in Minnesota is embracing the uncertainty with *Mashopolis*, a 2D-animated series following young gamers who virtually roleplay different careers.

The public media organization received a Ready to Learn grant from the US Department of Education for this 40 x 30-minute series, which is in early development and set to air in 2025.

Gaming provided a great hook to get today's four- to eight-year-old digital natives interested in career prep. But what made it a perfect fit is that gaming organically exercises the skills and curriculum the series intends to explore, says Carol-Lynn Parente, a Sesame Workshop alum who now serves as an executive producer on TPT's Ready To Learn team.

"Gaming is all about using executive-functioning skills," Parente explains. "Failing levels, trying again, strategizing, planning—the fun takeaway for kids and adults is that the very act of playing games helps prepare you for a career." The goal is not to get kids to commit to a future job at age five, but to train them to tap into their desires and interests.

Lesley Goldman, TPT's chief content officer, says her team followed the viewpoint and research of Jennifer Curry, a professor of counselor education at Louisiana State University who argues that high school is too late to start thinking about career development, and a much earlier start is needed.

Curry's research solidified TPT's decision to target elementary students, and the pubcaster conducted a needs assessment in 2020 after securing its production grant.

Across more than 600 families, the survey showed that kids only know about a limited number of occupations, spanning from common (doctor, firefighter) to idealized (YouTuber, pro gamer). "These results strongly guided our thinking, and made it a priority to highlight a super-diverse mix of careers on *Mashopolis*," Goldman says.

Much of the target audience for Ready To Learn projects comes from lower-income families, so it's critical to represent the value of jobs at all levels. The past two years have also introduced a timely relevance for young viewers, Parente says. "What better illustration than a pandemic to demonstrate how important service jobs are to the community?" K



Dream It To Be It **allows kids ages six to nine to see others their age exploring possible careers**





Lingokids' educational podcast ***Growin' Up*** **introduces kids ages five to eight to the ins and outs of different jobs**

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Indie life

Kidscreen delves into the state of feature films with three seasoned execs with major resumés who are now flexing their skills at indie prodcos.

BY: ANDREA HERNANDEZ

Against a backdrop of corporate consolidation, changing demographics and media's ongoing digital evolution, movement in entertainment's upper ranks has shifted into overdrive.

In some cases, high-profile executives who have spent their careers at major media conglomerates are cashing in hard-won wisdom for gigs at smaller studios, driven by a longing to get closer to the action, return to their creative roots, or dive into new out-of-the-box opportunities like NFTs.

Especially in the feature film space, the kids biz has seen a number of these changes play out through the pandemic and its aftermath. We caught up with three industry veterans—Mary Coleman, Saxton Moore and David Park—who made the move from majors to indies, and found that despite challenges like small crews and lower budgets, their ambitions have never been bigger.

Coleman joined London-based prodco Locksmith Animation in June as chief creative officer after working for more than two decades at Pixar. During her time at Disney's venerated animation studio, she participated in the creative process that birthed family classics such as *Finding Nemo, The Incredibles* and *Monsters, Inc.*

Moore moved to Missouri-based Lion Forge Animation two years ago as VP of production. He previously worked at Nickelodeon and Silvergate Media, and his work as an illustrator has been featured in hit shows such as *Hilda* and *Chico Bon Bon*, both currently airing on Netflix.

Park started at UK-based Passion Pictures last year as head of long-form animation, with 15 years of experience at Pixar, where he served in a series of production roles on movies including *WALL-E, Toy Story 3* and *Coco*.

Here's what these three heavy-hitters had to say about jumping into a smaller pond.

You moved from a major studio to an indie. What are some of the factors that influenced this decision?

Mary Coleman: I didn't know I was ready for a new challenge until the Locksmith opportunity came my way. I loved my 23 years at Pixar and wouldn't trade them for anything, but the chance to stretch and grow in a new role was too hard to pass up (and the London location didn't hurt).

Saxton Moore: I was at a point in my career where I chose to have a full-time job with benefits at a company where I was given an opportunity to help grow the business and make impactful content for the culture.

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David Park: I had been in feature animation for 17 years, and while it was an absolutely thrilling and rewarding ride, I felt that there were avenues in animation that I hadn't had the chance to explore. Passion Pictures provided new opportunities to work on more eclectic projects in different styles, with a highly talented group of directors and artists from around the world.

What is it about this specific company's approach or slate that intrigued you?

MC: When I started in 1999 at Pixar, it was relatively small. We all knew each other, and in every movie, there was a sense that we were all in it together. I'm excited to be part of a small studio again. The women's leadership team was also a big draw for me.

SM: I joined Lion Forge because it is a Black-owned company with a focus on telling amazing stories featuring people of color and underrepresented communities. The company got off to a great start with an Oscar win for the animated short *Hair Love*. The opportunity for impact is so much greater working here, and I knew I had to be a part of the magic they are creating.

DP: Artists here are given the opportunity to tell character-driven stories that may not get the same oxygen in a larger studio. Several of the projects came directly from Passion's roster of directors, which is very special—it is incredibly inspiring to see how a [smaller] studio supports and grows its in-house talent.

How would you describe the opportunities in kids & family animated features right now?

SM: In the time that we are living in right now, kids need magical stories that teach them love, kindness and compassion, as well as films that awaken their imagination as a way of escaping from reality. That kind of storytelling can't be found on TikTok.

DP: On one hand, streaming has allowed many smaller studios from different parts of the world to get their work in front of larger audiences. This is exciting from the standpoint of broadening the scope of styles, looks and types of stories in animation. On the other hand, animated features on the big screen are clawing their way back. It feels like the streaming/big-screen balance is still finding its way, and I'm hoping for the best of both worlds. Personally, I love watching movies at home, but I need to see some of them in theaters, with an audience. Audiences need both, and it seems that with the right stories, there are even more avenues and opportunities.


Mary Coleman


Saxton Moore


David Park

What challenges are you anticipating by moving from a major to an indie? What is made easier?

MC: The challenge is the flip side of what will be easier—it's easier to turn a speedboat than a ship, but a ship is very stable.

SM: Some of the challenges are having to build out a new team of designers and artists, and picking the right content to produce that will position us. Also, working with a smaller team at Lion Forge means that I can directly contribute more, and see more of our content through to completion.

DP: Not having the scale of resources a larger studio is able to provide is certainly different, but the trade-off is having the option to work on so many different types of stories and styles. Passion is growing, but still able to be very nimble and adventurous.

What kinds of stories do you think kids are interested in these days?

MC: It's a cliché, but I'm finding that they want to see stories about kids older than them, to project themselves into the future. They also seem to crave a level of excitement that my generation didn't expect all stories to have. They watch action movies at a much younger age.

DP: Kids want engaging stories that challenge them—which means that animation can address many complex issues, such as being heard and seen, finding identity and a unique place in the world, and growing up. Also, children want stories they can share and discuss with others.

Do you think the magic of the movies will prevail theatrically? Or are kids headed towards a time when streaming is all they know?

SM: There's always magic in theatrical movies. It's an escape from reality, if only for an hour or two. When the lights go off and that red curtain draws open, as you're sitting there with a friend or family member, there's a rush of excitement and anticipation that you can't get from a streaming service.

DP: There will always be a place for the shared experience of going to the movies. Streaming has certainly democratized and revolutionized viewing, but the ritual of sitting in a theater can and will exist alongside home viewing. We have the best of both worlds right now—big, animated features that families can enjoy at the cinema, along with the variety of stories and styles from smaller global studios provided by the streaming expansion. K





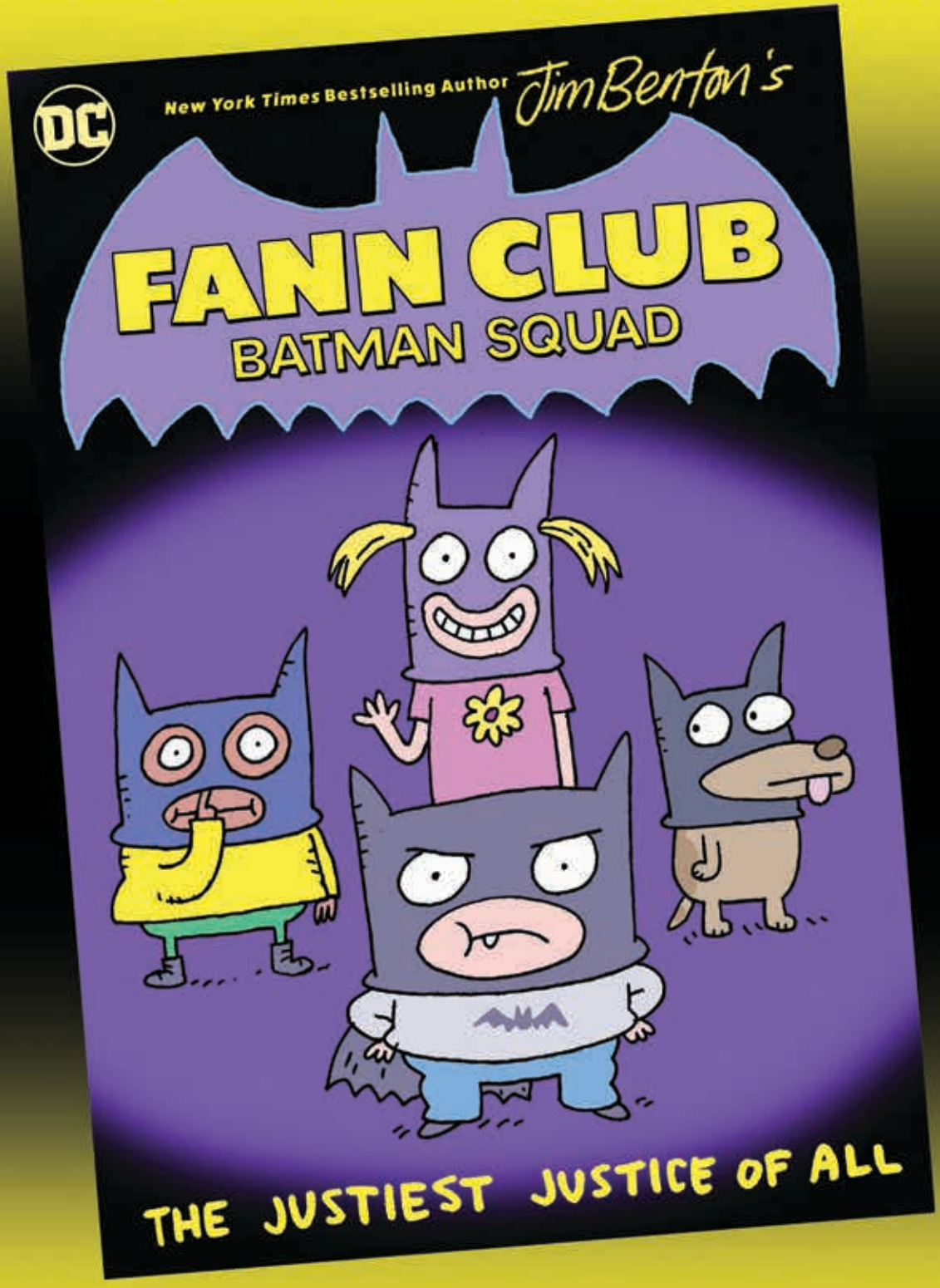


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Kids use the Toybox 3D printer and plastic filament to print their toys at home, eliminating injection molding, packaging and shipping

Fit to print

Toycos are building up the mass-market appeal of 3D printers through licensed products and customization platforms.

BY: COLE WATSON

When 3D printers made their debut in 1986, the technology was locked behind a maze of barriers to entry, including software, bulky equipment and limited applications. Skip ahead to today, and toycos are kicking off a 3D-printing revolution, moving the tech beyond hobbyists and industry niches into the mass-market hands of maker kids eager to play a starring role in their toy's production.

Leading the DIY charge is LA-based Toybox Labs, which began selling its same-name 3D printers online in 2018 for kids ages eight and up. To date, the company has designed and imported more than 3,000 original toys to its online platform—including whole ranges of action figures, vehicles and animals that can be printed within 10 minutes.

Accessing the catalogue is a community of more than 25,000 monthly users, who are able to print any of Toybox's original toys for free, or pay up to US$5 to print a licensed toy. The company also runs a monthly Play Packs subscription service in the US. Each pack comes with a toy design file to run through the printer that can then be assembled with manufactured parts (a small motor, for example) to make a mechanical toy powered by a proprietary app. Options include remote-controlled cars, musical instruments and battle-style spinning tops.

Toybox inked its first licensing deal in 2020 with UK-based Beano Studios for a line of Dennis and Gnasher: Unleashed! action figures. Since then, it has partnered with several other studios to bring their iconic IPs onto the Toybox platform, including Warner Bros. Discovery (Looney Toons and DC Comics), Paramount (SpongeBob SquarePants) and Illumination (Minions).

These big-brand deals have certainly powered up the company's product offering, but they have also necessitated increased security measures on the platform to protect the high-value IPs involved.

"The only way I can do a deal with Viacom, Warner Bros. and Universal is because we have a patented process that will encrypt our files," says Toybox COO Malcolm Bird. "When you print Patrick, SpongeBob, Batman or any [licensed character], those files never hit your computer; they go directly to your printer."

Bird says the company's manufacturing model is potentially disruptive, eliminating





Hasbro's Selfie Series lets kids put their own faces on one of 14 action figures, including Power Rangers



the most expensive and time-consuming elements in the toy supply chain. "Kids use the Toybox machine and plastic filament they buy from us to print their toys at home, [so] we don't have the injection molding, the packaging or the shipping from China at the last mile," he explains.

Another benefit of Toybox's DTC model? The company doesn't have to negotiate with retailers for shelf space or create unnecessary waste during the manufacturing process. And its catalogue of toys that are at consumers' fingertips continues to grow in a unique product pipeline compared to retail.

"We started off by developing three toys for Warner Bros.—now they have more than 50 on the platform. However, toy number one is still available to print and can still make money," says Bird. "There's an unlimited shelf life for these products online because we don't take the files down."

He sees toys as the catalyst that will shift 3D printers from niche to mainstream, moving from the hobbyist realm into standard home office equipment. While the device is targeted primarily at kids, Bird says even parents are picking up the technology—many have begun skipping the lines at local retailers, opting to print out their own decorations and housewares at home instead.

Back in kidland, Hasbro has been "toying" with the technology for decades. "We were early adopters of 3D printing; our first printers were big industrial machines that we put in place around 1997," recalls Patrick Marr, senior director of model development. "As we saw the printers and the resolutions getting better, we were more and more interested in how we [could] continue to leverage this technology outside of manufacturing."

Hasbro's first 3D outing in the consumer space happened in 2014, when it partnered with 3D printing marketplace Shapeways to launch SuperFanArt. This e-commerce site allowed artists to design and sell their original 3D creations based on Hasbro brands such as My Little Pony, Transformers and Monopoly. The move proved to be a bit premature in the market, and the collaboration only lasted a year.

But fast-forward seven years, and Hasbro is now firmly in the consumer space. In July, it forged a new partnership with Massachusetts-based Formlabs and launched a custom e-commerce platform called Selfie Series. Using a proprietary app, toy fans in the US can scan their own faces and put them on one of 14 Hasbro action figures from IPs including Marvel, Star Wars, Ghostbusters, Power Rangers and G.I. Joe.

Marr says the company was inspired by fan cosplay at conventions and other public events. "Fans are always looking for new ways to absorb or become engrossed in their favorite brands," he explains. "We're looking at mass customization, and going direct-to-consumer is the perfect pipeline for us to engage with our fan base."

Hasbro debuted the Selfie Series at its San Diego Comic-Con booth in July, and show-goers ate it up. "Within two minutes after opening the doors, we had 200 people in line for selfies, so we knew the audience was behind the project, and they all knew which figure they wanted to become," recalls Marr of the response.

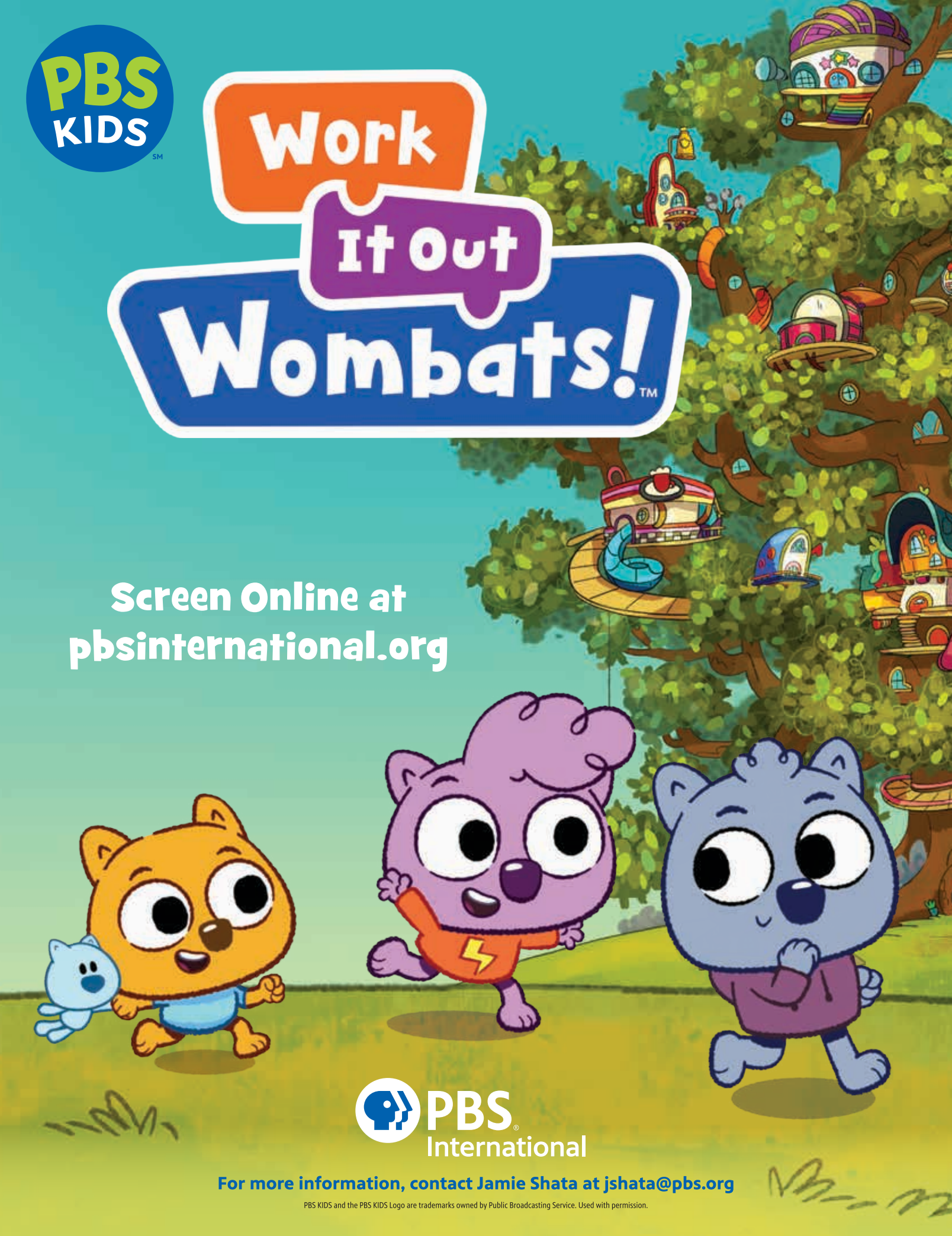
Formlabs has also inked similar deals with major consumer brands in the US looking to launch mass customization platforms, including Procter & Gamble's Gillette for its Razor Maker line of custom and limited-edition razor handles; and footwear manufacturer New Balance for its TripleCell range of customizable shoes.

To date, Formlabs has sold more than 100,000 3D printers to industries including aerospace (NASA recently sent Formlabs printed parts to space aboard the SpaceX Dragon Resupply Capsule) and entertainment (Aaron Sims Creative used Formlabs digital printing to create the Demogorgon prop used in *Stranger Things*). The printers are most in demand in the healthcare and dental sectors, which account for more than a quarter of the company's total sales to date.

While 3D printers are best suited to larger industrial projects, the tech's accessibility and mass customization features will be key drivers in helping it expand to new markets and audiences, says Gary Rowe, Formlabs' head of business development.

Big-box stores and e-commerce may be the kings of the modern toy retail landscape, but a DTC, 3D-printable future is slowly gaining ground. As more brands and high-value licenses jump onto these platforms, opportunities for more kids to adopt the tech will surely follow.

And really, what kid could resist putting their face on Iron Man's body or making their very own Minions? K


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It's all in the cards

What does it take to win in the trading card game? Wizards of the Coast, Ravensburger and Konami weigh in.

BY: COLE WATSON

Since its inception in the early '90s, the trading card game (TCG) market has been dominated by three core competitors—*Magic: The Gathering, Yu-Gi-Oh!* and *Pokémon*. All are still going strong (some stronger than ever), but they're upwards of 20 years old. How do these category juggernauts continue to thrive? And is there space for new players?

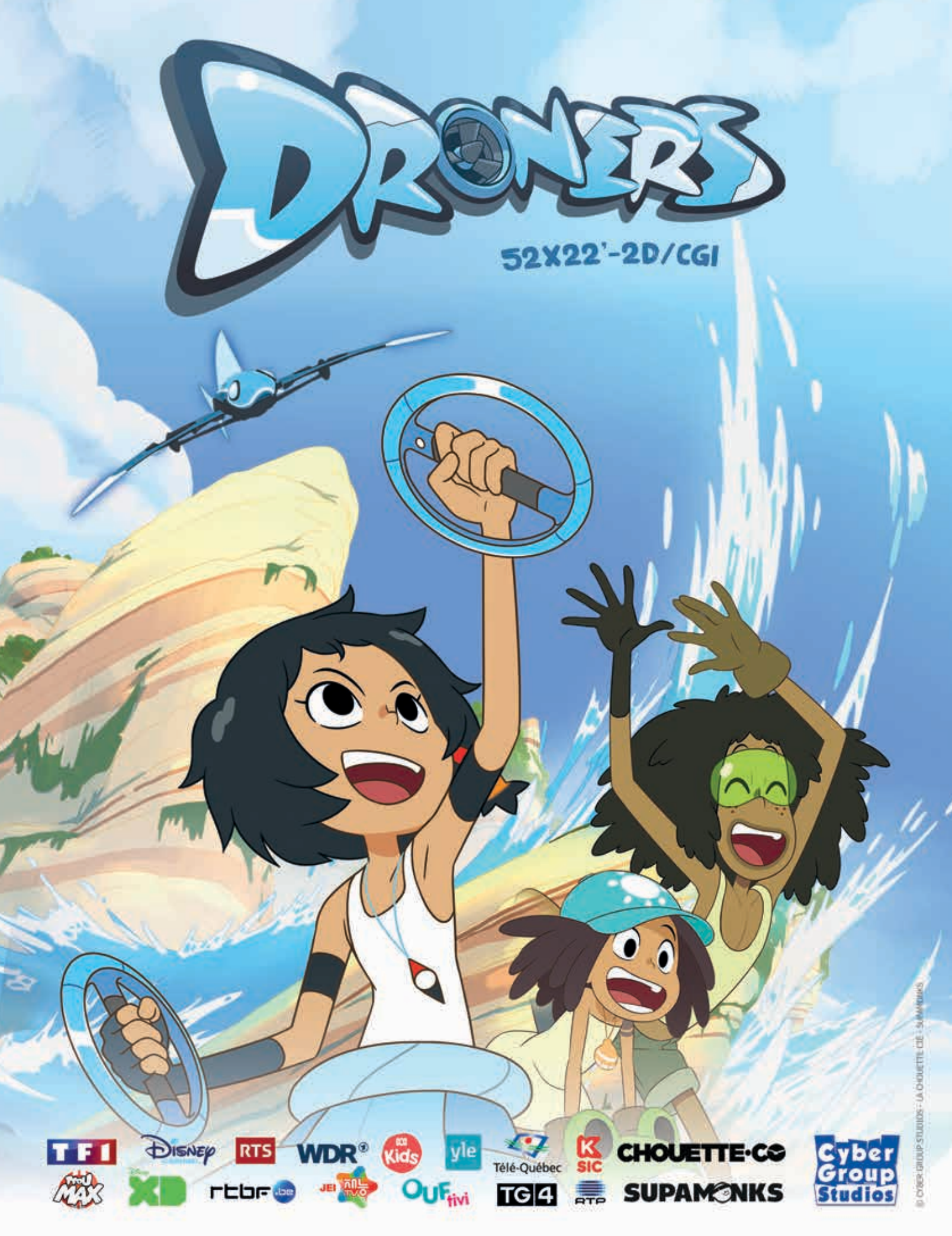
Two giants of the kids industry are betting big that the answer to this last question is "yes." The internet was ablaze this summer with news of UK-based board game publisher Ravensburger's partnership with Disney to launch a new TCG, *Disney Lorcana*, in 2023. The game sees players assume the role of Illumineers—powerful sorcerers who use Disney's treasury of characters, songs and stories to compete against each other in *Lorcana*'s lore-filled environments.

Asking consumers to essentially sign up for an ongoing, long-term relationship that relies on a physical community of like-minded pals was a bold move. But Ryan Miller, Ravensburger's brand manager and the co-designer of *Disney Lorcana*, says the two companies have the right chemistry for a successful joint-venture. "Ravensburger has been interested in the TCG space for a while, but it was important that we first had the right team, support, vision and partner to create a TCG that fans deserve, which will stand the test of time in the market."

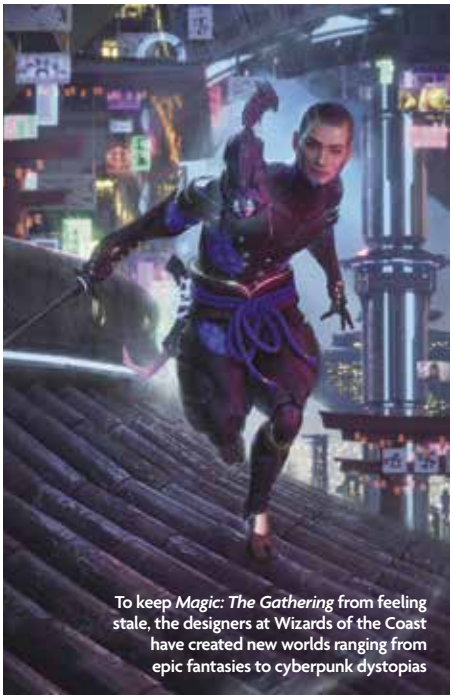
Miller joined Ravensburger North America in 2020 after three separate stints as a brand



Ravensburger unveiled its first set of *Disney Lorcana* cards at this year's D23 Expo in a limited-edition collector's set


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To keep *Magic: The Gathering* from feeling stale, the designers at Wizards of the Coast have created new worlds ranging from epic fantasies to cyberpunk dystopias

manager and game designer for *Magic: The Gathering* at Washington-based Wizards of the Coast. Using this experience, Miller and other card game vets at Ravensburger developed several Disney-branded board games—including *Disney Villainous, Space Mountain: All Systems Go* and *Disney Hocus Pocus: The Game*—before getting the greenlight from the House of Mouse to start on *Lorcana*.

While a *Lorcana's First Chapter* booster set is slated for release in fall 2023, the team at Ravensburger teased consumers with a limited-edition set of six cards at Disney's D23 Expo in September. Featuring newly created artwork of Stitch, Robin Hood, Cruella De Vil, Maleficent, Elsa and Captain Hook, the sets sold out every day at the fan event.

"The response at this year's D23 Expo completely blew us away," says Miller. "We had a line that stretched all the way out of the hall, and it proved to us that we've really got something special here."

Throughout the game's development, Miller has been focused on building *Lorcana* to appeal to a wide community of collectors and players, which he sees as the most important component of forging a TCG with longevity.

"If it's too hard for a player to find an opponent, or for a collector to find someone to trade with, the game is unlikely to resonate in the market, regardless of how fun it is," explains Miller. "You also want it to have lots of interactivity, so that you feel like your skill has a big effect on the game's outcome. Finally, you need an engaging theme that supports lots of card concepts and collectibility."



Mark Rosewater, Wizards of the Coast's head designer for *Magic: The Gathering* since 2003, agrees that community is the fundamental building block of a successful TCG, and it requires a dedicated experiential marketing plan.

"Through our Wizards Play Network, we run Friday Night Magic events in over 6,000 stores around the world every week," says Rosewater. "It's important to us that we are building community around the game at the local level and supporting these small business owners. We also partner with tournament operators on regional and national championships for those who value competition."

Since pioneering the TCG market and launching its debut card set in 1993, *Magic* has attracted more than 50 million players to date, Rosewater estimates.

Hasbro aquired Wizards in 1999 for nearly US$325 million, and it has become one of the toyco's three core divisions, alongside entertainment and consumer products. Now, Hasbro has put Wizards at the forefront of its five-year growth strategy, and *Magic: The Gathering* is on track to become the company's first billion-dollar brand in yearly revenue.

In the game, *Magic* players take to the field as Planeswalkers that draw energy from the elements of fire, water, earth, darkness and light to summon otherworldly creatures and cast powerful spells from across the


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multiverse. After nearly 30 years of releasing new sets and products, Wizards has printed more than 20,000 unique cards that players can use in several gameplay formats, including standard tournament play, booster pack drafts and community created games.

Magic's recipe for staying successful and relevant in the market for so long is down to its team of designers, artists and editors, who continue to push the game in new directions and try out new themes, says Rosewater.

"The key to keeping *Magic* exciting is to keep coming up with different ideas for what a set can be. It can be a visit to a fairy tale world, a gothic horror world, or even an underground world filled with dinosaurs."

Each year, Wizards releases several booster sets that it connects in-game through lore and over-arching stories. In 2020, the game publisher began inking licensing deals with other companies to bring their IPs into *Magic* and amp up the game's collectibility, beginning with a collaboration with Japanese prodco Toho that culminated in the release alternate-art versions of cards based on the iconic atomic lizard Godzilla.

Following this inaugural partnership, Wizards has increased the scale and frequency of its co-branded releases, signing new deals with companies including AMC (*The Walking Dead*), tabletop game specialist Games Workshop (*Warhammer*) and digital game developer Riot Games (*Arcane*).

While *Magic*'s foundation is in physical products, Wizards also sees opportunity in the multi-billion-dollar video game industry to widen the brand's player base and move into new markets, notes Rosewater. Since zeroing in on this strategy in 2017, Wizards has launched two free-to-play card games for home consoles and mobile devices—*Magic Spellslingers* (2022) and *Magic: The Gathering Arena* (2018)—which together have generated more than a million downloads in the Google Play Store alone.

Meanwhile, New York-based Konami Cross Media has embraced digital gaming for several years as part of its 360-degree global brand strategy for anime-inspired TCG *Yu-Gi-Oh!*. And this unexpectedly helped the game grow during the pandemic.

"A number of our offices in Europe were figuring out ways to host tournaments because so many of them were closed and in lockdown," explains Jennifer Coleman, VP of marketing and licensing. "By having a gaming strategy in place, we were able to keep our existing audience and engage with new ones. It also helped bring back players who wanted to re-engage with the game in a more casual way and restart their physical card collections."

Unlike other TCGs in the market, *Yu-Gi-Oh!* debuted in Japan in 1996 as a serialized manga series by Kazuki Takahashi. Following its release, Takahashi's work has been adapted into anime series, games, toy lines and a thriving TCG that has remained strong in the market for nearly 25 years. By continuing to support the property with new content and products, Yu-Gi-Oh! has evolved into a cross-generational brand.

> Outside of the card game, our audience is also hungry and clamoring for collectibles.
>
> —Jennifer Coleman, Konami Cross Media

"Millennials have been a sustaining fan base for us for many years, but now we're starting to trend with Gen Z and Alpha because of the new anime and licensed products," says Coleman. "I think that where we've been really lucky is that the content has matched the gameplay and the play pattern, which creates this incredible life cycle that we can build by renewing and refreshing the content for new generations."

Another core element of Konami's strategy to support the brand is building partnerships outside the TCG space by exploring new product categories like apparel and home decor, as well as less-tapped sub-categories like computer hardware and cosplay.

"Outside of the card game, our audience is also hungry and clamoring for collectibles," says Coleman. "You've got to have everything from super high-end statues down to affordable Funko Pops." She adds that this strategy helps refresh the audience's interest and keeps them engaged in the Yu-Gi-Oh! fandom longer, even if they aren't active in the card game.

"All of these elements have really helped Yu-Gi-Oh! stay in the zeitgeist, which may have not happened if we solely focused on the trading card game," says Coleman. "Whether it's managing social media, learning about influencers and streaming, or signing new brand partnerships, we have to continue to change and adapt the way we interact with our audience to keep them engaged and happy." k



PhatMojo's new line of collectible mini-figures features several of Yu-Gi-Oh!'s most iconic monsters, including the Blue-Eyes White Dragon and Exodia

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Product trends on the road to retail



It's a lifestyle

Fandom's transition from appreciation to personal expression opens up a whole new world of consumer products potential.

BY: CHRISTOPHER BYRNE

Whether you call it the "Funko Phenomenon," the "Marvel Metamorphosis" or something else entirely, kid-focused entertainment brands are expanding way beyond toys and increasingly becoming lifestyle brands. This presents a powerful draw for consumers—and a gilt-edged opportunity for IP owners and merchandisers.

But before we delve into that, it's important to distinguish a lifestyle brand from a collectible brand.

Collecting has been part of human civilization throughout history—think of the treasures packed inside the Egyptian pyramids. In more modern times, Barbie, G.I. Joe, Beanie Babies and Hot Wheels all became collectibles, and lifestyle brands to some.

But what distinguishes a pure lifestyle brand is the active engagement of a consumer with it, beyond simply appreciating a cherished object in an artfully lit glass cabinet. A lifestyle brand becomes part of someone's identity, and a means of celebrating individual affinity with—and membership in—a community that shares that passion.

Lifestyle expression can range from wearing a branded T-shirt to dropping US$25,000 for a limited-edition Baccarat Pikachu figure. From a merchandise perspective, a toy- or entertainment-derived lifestyle brand offers products beyond playsets, action figures, etc.

Just Google "Harry Potter drinkware," and prepare to be totally overwhelmed. Wizarding World licensing may have started with IP-based toys (pictured), but the franchise's spinoffs are now in such high demand—across an array of demographics—that there's a retail store in New York with a permanent lineup of fans looking to snag mugs, apparel, Swarovski figurines and even Gryffindor-scented candles.

Marvel is similarly powerful, with licensed products like Adidas' Black Panther shoes. To a lesser extent, My Little Pony fans—the Bronies—while not officially targeted as a customer segment, represent a significant cohort. And don't even get me started on the impact of cosplay, fan groups, etc.

All lifestyle brands have one thing in common—something in the mythos of the brand speaks to something in the individual, to the point where they want to incorporate it into their everyday life and identity. Perhaps more importantly, the essence of the brand is aspirational. It's a reminder of the power of myth as a means of understanding the world and our place in it.

Of course, not every brand has the potential to make the leap from fandom to lifestyle. What distinguishes a lifestyle brand is time. Harry Potter is now on its second generation of fans. Marvel is on its third. The stories and characters have become part of people's lives, personal narratives and social communities. These fans may have grown out of playing with traditional toys, but their connection to the characters—and to others who love them—remains strong. Hence: Harry Potter drinkware.

Can you manufacture a lifestyle brand? Probably not. But what all of these brands have in common are strong, complex narratives with classic themes—truth, justice, righting wrongs and so on—in mythic proportions. That provides the aspirational underpinning.

For most brands, aiming for lifestyle status isn't part of the initial strategy. It evolves. It can't be predicted, but in the case of Harry Potter, kids were making their own fan-based stuff before licensing kicked in, so the trajectory was pretty clear early on.

My best advice? Start with a powerful story and build from there. If the story takes hold and proceeds to last a lifetime, you've hit the jackpot. k

CHRISTOPHER BYRNE (a.k.a. The Toy Guy) is a toy expert, consultant, author and co-host of *The Playground Podcast*.

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Do nice guys finish first?

An exploration of character strengths and the big impact they have on box-office performance in modern kids movies.

BY: LAUREN TAYLOR, ABBIE BURRUS & YALDA UHLS

Children are spending a significant portion of their time consuming media—which is a good thing for those who make content; a potential concern for parents whose kids consume it; and an exciting opportunity for imparting social and emotional learning and the skills necessary for development and life success.

Parents value this. In fact, research by Common Sense Media (CSM) has shown that education around character strengths is the most important factor they consider when selecting shows and movies for their kids to watch. And guess what? This kind of content can make money, too.

Several years ago, CSM began an initiative to help parents, educators and children choose entertainment that models the skills and strengths necessary for positive youth development. Through extensive research, the team identified a list of 11 key character strengths and life skills that can be taught to young audiences through media. These include communication, compassion, courage, curiosity, empathy, gratitude, humility, integrity, perseverance, self-control and teamwork.

This list was then used to develop a first-of-its-kind tagging system that helps parents and children easily identify content promoting these core strengths and skills. In our sample of films, the most frequent ones tagged were perseverance (tagged 795 times), courage (tagged 732 times) and teamwork (tagged 614 times).

We then conducted focus groups and surveys to evaluate the system's effectiveness, and found that both parents and children responded more positively to content with those tags. But the question is, will they pay for it?

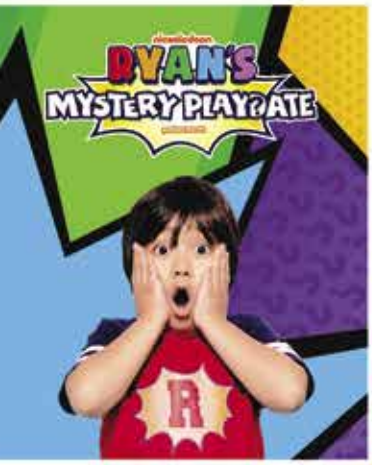
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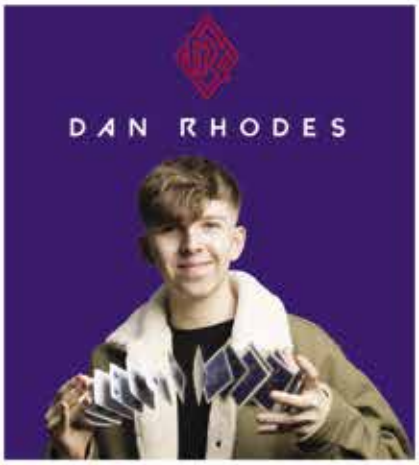
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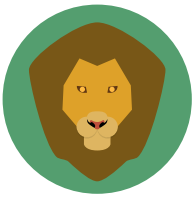
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11 key character strengths and life skills



Perseverance
795 tags



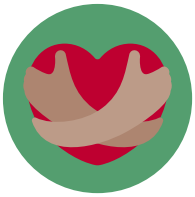
Courage
732 tags



Teamwork
614 tags



Compassion
412 tags



Empathy
382 tags



Communication
271 tags



Integrity
225 tags



Curiosity
162 tags



Gratitude
89 tags



Humility
89 tags



Self-Control
56 tags

At the box office

At the Center for Scholars & Storytellers (CSS), we work with content creators and researchers to harness the power of entertainment media to help the next generation thrive and grow. We wanted to see if there was a business case for making films that promote positive character strengths and life skills. So we partnered with CSM, which provided us with a dataset sourced from its reviews of 2,767 films that showed each one's tagged strengths and skills, plus star ratings and recommended ages.

The films selected for this sample were released in theaters post-2010 and given at least a three-star rating from CSM. In analyzing the data, we discovered some prominent takeaways.

Money talks

Movies that promote character strengths and life skills perform better at the box office, both domestically and internationally. Average worldwide ticket sales (sourced from boxofficemojo.com) for films tagged with strengths was more than US$87 million, compared to just US$36.5 million for other films.

It's important to note that this relationship held true regardless of the film's star rating. For example, 2022's *Minions: Rise of Gru* (four stars, no tags) made US$937.2 million worldwide, while 2013's *Despicable Me 2* (four stars, two tags) made US$970.7 million.

On the superhero front, Marvel's 2018 film *Deadpool 2* (four stars, no tags) made US$785.8 million worldwide, while 2019's *Captain Marvel* (four stars, three tags) made US$1.13 billion. DC superhero movies followed a similar pattern—2013's *Man of Steel* (three stars, no tags) made US$667.9 worldwide, and 2016's *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (three stars, one tag) made US$872.4.

Although ticket sales figures were not adjusted for inflation, these examples show that even films in the same "universe" seem to make less money when positive attributes are not anticipated or seen in reviews by parents.

Tomato power

The positive relationship between a film's success and its Common Sense star ratings and character strengths continued into the Rotten Tomatoes evaluations. For example, *Minions: Rise of Gru* (2022) has a 70% Tomatometer rating, while *Despicable Me 2* (2013) is at 75%.

Teens: Not-so-titan

Films for teens were tagged with fewer strengths overall, compared to movies for younger kids. Specifically, teen pics were less likely to be tagged for curiosity, gratitude, humility and teamwork, and had an average of just 0.8 tags—nearly half of the average posted by films for other kid age groups.

In fact, films for teens were more likely to not contain any character strengths or skills. And more importantly, they were also less likely to be tagged for skills necessary for healthy social relationships, such as gratitude, humility and teamwork.

There's a clear gap in the market right now for values-driven entertainment for teens, who are at a critical and difficult stage of their lives. They are encountering key developmental milestones of relationship development and identity formation at a time when mental health crises are at an all-time high. We feel teens would benefit from seeing more role models in their entertainment that exhibit strengths and skills for social-emotional development.

Big winners

The top-grossing films listed with strengths were often family-targeted ones with a focus on friendship, adventure and superheroes, such as 2019's *Avengers: Endgame*, *The Kid Who Would Be King* (2019) and *Incredibles 2* (2018).

Takeaway: Values matter!

Let's face it—most feature filmmakers don't do it as a hobby. These projects need to be financially viable and, ideally, profitable. We hope this quantitative analysis proves that not only does content high in values make money, it makes more money than other content.

We encourage kids content creators to work with experts to develop stories that promote positive strengths and life skills in clear and educational ways. Your audience will benefit, and so will you! k

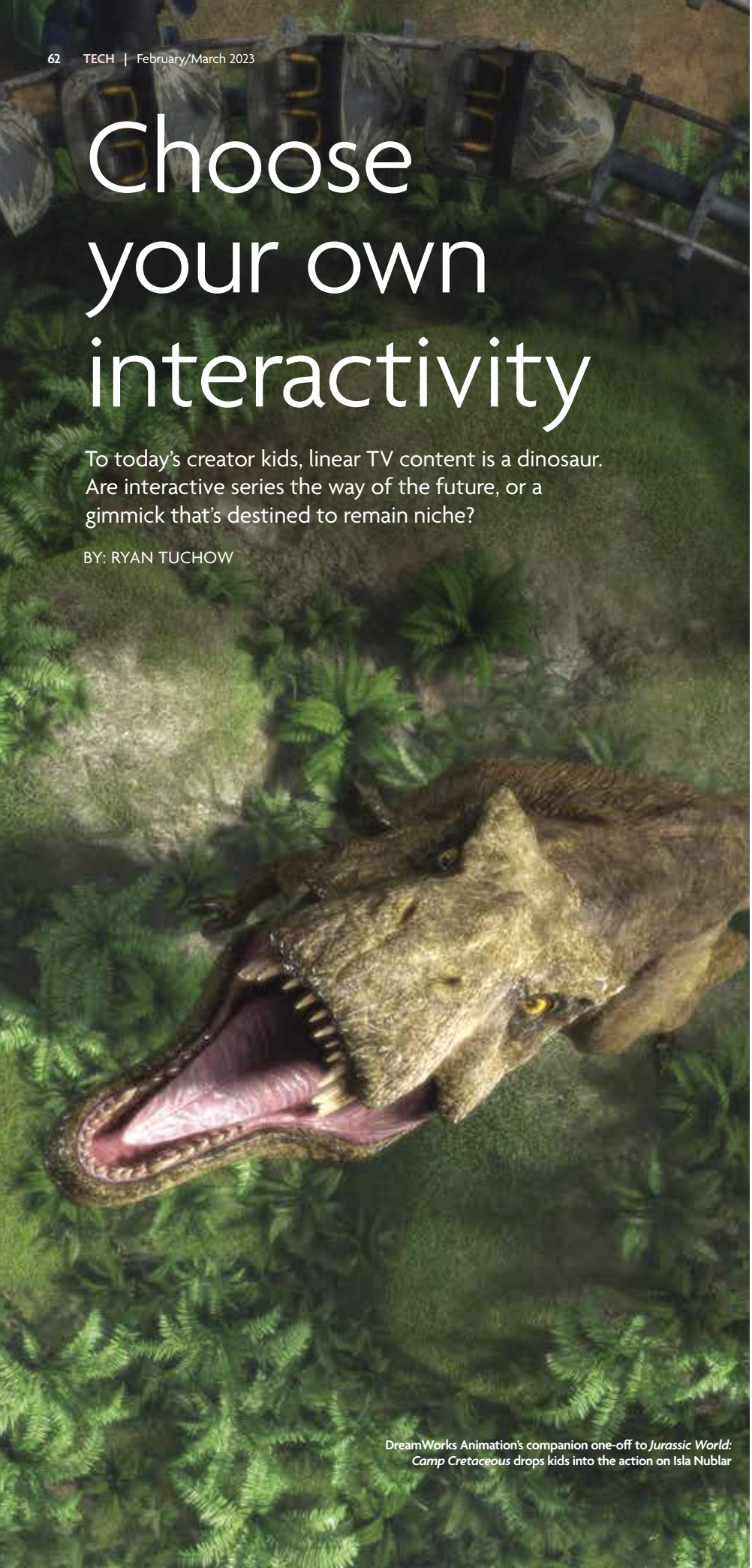
Yalda Uhls is the founder of the Center for Scholars & Storytellers at UCLA; Lauren Taylor is a fellow at CSS; and Abbie Burrus is a CSS intern.


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Choose your own interactivity

To today's creator kids, linear TV content is a dinosaur. Are interactive series the way of the future, or a gimmick that's destined to remain niche?

BY: RYAN TUCHOW



DreamWorks Animation's companion one-off to *Jurassic World: Camp Cretaceous* drops kids into the action on Isla Nublar

Interactive content isn't new, of course—*Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* was making headlines five years ago. But interactivity is on the rise in the kids entertainment market, which is looking for ways to tap into the social media hypertrend of kids as creators—and not just consumers—of content.

However, there are two major obstacles standing in the way. The first is a lack of distribution opportunities. For producers, making this type of content is entirely buyer-dependent, and most broadcasters aren't exactly banging down doors for it. And the second challenge is a lack of accessible and cost-effective production tools.

Interestingly, Netflix seems to have both the desire and the technology to make interactive content for younger audiences. Its proprietary Branch Manager visualization tool helps producers map out and build choose-your-own-adventure-style projects. The streamer has put it to work on kids titles like Netflix Animation's *Battle Kitty* (2022) and WildBrain's *Johnny Test's Ultimate Meatloaf Quest* (2021), and it's gearing up to launch an interactive special called *We Lost our Human* in 2023. A spokesperson for Netflix says it's committed to making more interactive series as part of a strategy to build a catalogue of transmedia properties.

Other companies, such as Gamisodes and Hellosaurus, are starting to explore ways to overcome the roadblocks and mine this white space by launching their own apps and streaming platforms. And we'll touch on those efforts in a little bit.

But first, how complicated are interactive series to make? Producers we interviewed say that a 30-minute special typically requires more than triple the volume of content in order to create multiple story paths, but building for interactivity only marginally increases a project's final budget.

DreamWorks Animation has made several 30- to 40-minute interactive specials for Netflix, starting with *Spirit Riding Free: Ride Along Adventure* and *Puss in Book: Trapped in an Epic Tale*. But more recently, the studio has given its most prehistoric IP an interactive twist.

Jurassic World: Camp Cretaceous Hidden Adventure is a 32-minute one-off that sees the lead characters from the animated series, stranded on Isla Nublar, embark on a quest to score a stockpile of food. A co-pro with Universal Pictures and Amblin Entertainment,

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the special launched on Netflix in November 2022. It required the production of close to 70 minutes of content, which was basically equivalent to making three episodes of the *Camp Cretaceous* series, says executive producer Scott Kreamer.

Three directors, three storyboard teams and almost the entire production staff were involved in the project, he adds. And since interactivity was a first for Kreamer and his team, DreamWorks Animation also hired former Netflix interactive executive Julius Harper as a writer and narrative designer to help craft the complicated story.

Despite its challenges, Kreamer says the format was a perfect fit for the IP. The foundation of the Camp Cretaceous brand is kid-led storytelling, unlike the Jurassic Park films, in which the kids are sidelined and need to be rescued by adults. *Hidden Adventure* takes this aspiration several steps further.

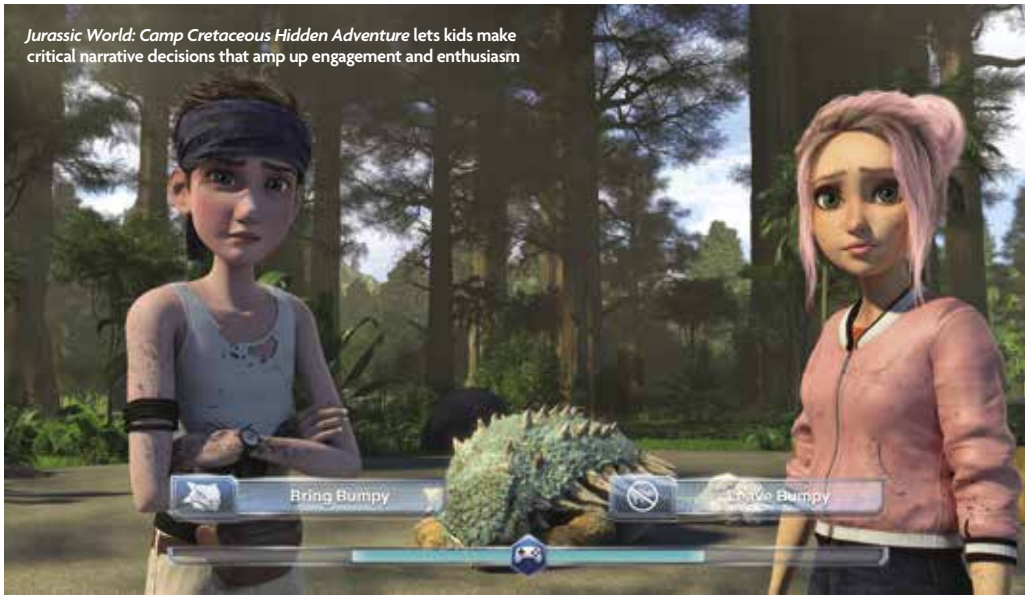
"You hope that when kids watch a regular episode, they're transported and see themselves in the characters," says Kreamer. "This is just the next step of that, where kids can be [actual characters], and make decisions and choices."

DreamWorks Animation's more traditional interactive series model gamifies the passive experience of watching TV. But some producers are looking to push interactivity even further by putting kids right into the story. Southern California-based techco Gamisodes is launching a platform this year where it will host episodes of licensed shows that feature added moments in which a child's avatar can be inserted to play a mini-game and keep the story moving.

It's a twist on the typical franchise model where TV content, gaming and monetization are designed as three separate streams, says Gamisodes CEO Davis Brimer. Companies will typically build out a brand with a linear series before supporting it with a video game and consumer products, but interactive content blends them all together.

On Gamisodes' free-to-use platform, kids will be able to watch and play episodes and buy things like apparel for their avatar. The company signed its first-ever licensing deal in July, partnering with WildBrain to bring classic animated series *Inspector Gadget* onto the platform. Gamisodes is currently working on turning the adventure show's catalogue of episodes into actual "gamisodes" in which moments from the show, such as car and foot chase scenes, become racing games, says Brimer.





Jurassic World: Camp Cretaceous Hidden Adventure **lets kids make critical narrative decisions that amp up engagement and enthusiasm**

It's similar to what pubcaster PBS KIDS has been experimenting with for the last few years. Working with Boston pubcaster GBH Kids, PBS KIDS launched interactive series *Scribbles and Ink* in 2019 and *Team Hamster!* in 2020.

Available on the PBS KIDS website and game app, these hybrid experiences play out like normal episodes of a series but then become games where kids must draw (*Scribbles and Ink*) or move objects (*Team Hamster!*) to advance the story. In *Scribbles and Ink*, whatever viewers draw becomes a part of the video, so kids can actually see their doodle of a spaceship fly through a universe they've created, for example.

For PBS KIDS, this blend of videos and games is appealing because it provides the rare mix of a tactile experience and lean-back viewing, says VP and GM Sara DeWitt. For many years, the worlds of gaming and content have been very separate, but projects like these are starting to blur the lines. And that's a good thing.

"Kids get the fun payoff because they can play these games and see their creations

Tencent Kids Originals







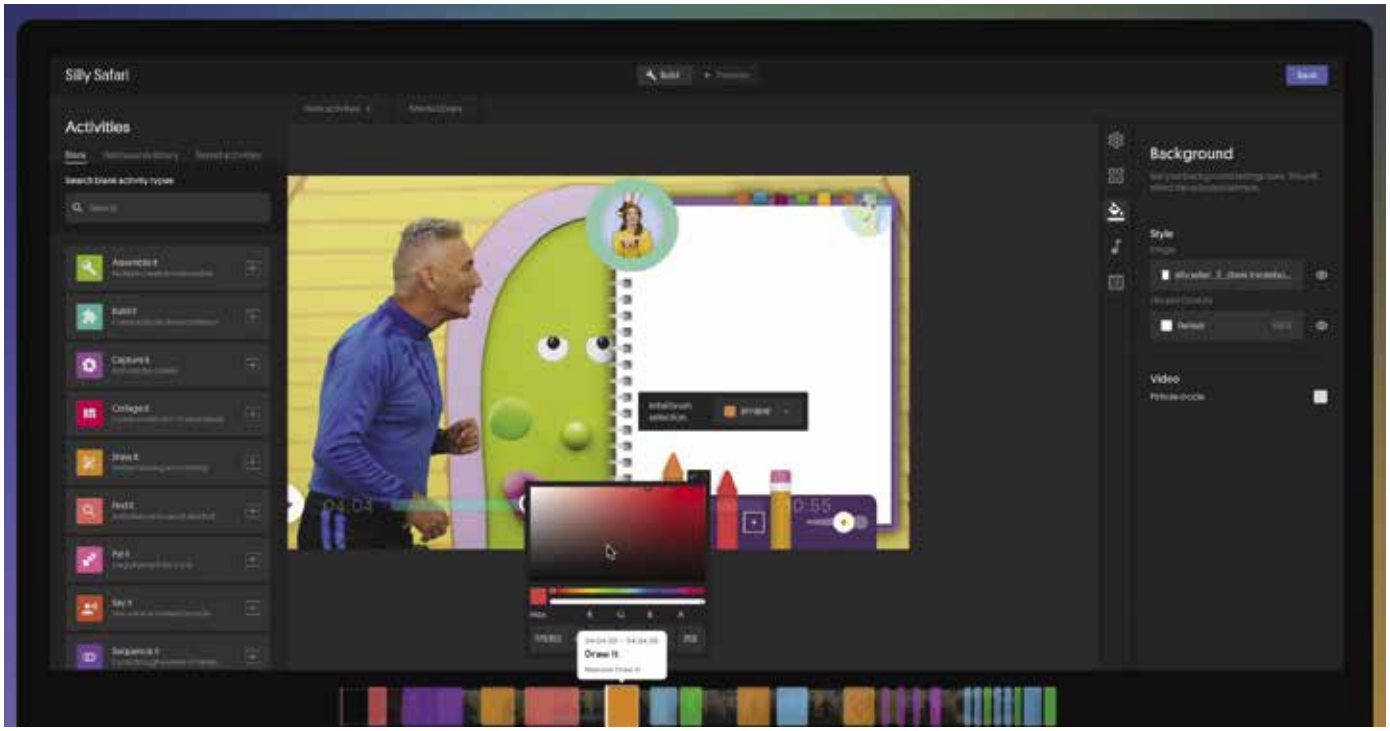


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The Hellosaurus Creator Studio tool lets producers add interactive features to videos as a cost-effective solution for immersive content

becoming part of the characters' world," says DeWitt. "Producers also aren't limited by strict formats or having to decide if something has to be a game or a show, because it can be both."

These two projects have been a success with kids. *Scribbles and Ink* has generated more than 21 million page views since it launched in 2019, says DeWitt. And it consistently ranks as one of the top games on the PBS KIDS site, which is especially significant because it's an original property competing against games for established brands like Wild Kratts and Arthur.

In play testing, kids told PBS that the games make them feel like creators and engineers. Plus, the experience is different for every child every time, since what they add to it is unique to that moment of engagement. DeWitt says her team has more of this content planned.

One of its next experiments will see the pubcaster bring artificial intelligence (AI) to the animated series *Elinor Wonders Why*. PBS KIDS worked with the University of California Irvine on making an episode of the series using AI to let Elinor pose questions to her kid viewers, listen to their responses, and then answer them.

"Interactive content achieves the goals kids tell us they have for playing with characters, being in the story world, and being creators themselves," says DeWitt. "It also lets us play with different formats and go beyond the restraints of TV."

But if you're not set up the way a pubcaster like PBS is, with supportive partnerships and infrastructure, producing interactive content can be a difficult path to navigate. And that's where New York-based techco Hellosaurus comes in. The SVOD platform is app-based and uses the organic capabilities of smartphones—and kids' familiarity with swiping and tapping—to host videos from partners that have included The Wiggles and Super Simple Songs (36 million YouTube subscribers). In fact, its interactive tools are so appealing that the company was acquired in December by edtech specialist Brilliant Worldwide.

Hellosaurus CEO James Ruben—who will stay in his role through the acquisition—says he saw white space when he noticed that producers wanted to do interactive content but didn't know how. To meet this need, Hellosaurus made its proprietary Creator Studio tool available to anyone. Using it, creatives can easily drag-and-drop elements—like a box of crayons kids can draw with—into their videos, which they can then post on their own websites and channels. Creators are able to make an interactive video in a matter of days with the tool, says Ruben. But the goal is to make it even easier.

"We want to democratize the creation of this content," he explains. "You don't need to be an engineer to use our tools, and we're working to make it so producers can make interactive videos in a couple of hours."

Hellosaurus has around 50 hours of playable content on its platform, and Ruben says he's seeing consumer demand for it grow, so the company is now expanding to serve audiences beyond its two-to-eight target demo. It's also moving into making and acquiring more educational content to leverage interactivity as a teaching tool that lets kids learn while playing.

There's no question that the market for interactive entertainment is growing, but when it comes to scale, there's a unique challenge ahead for companies in the space. Although connected TVs offer interactivity, it's not the same as a phone, so a divide between mobile- and TV-focused content models may be brewing.

For now, though, interactive content is definitely on-trend as more and more kids are expecting to be able to interact with their favorite IPs. "We've seen that kids prefer the interactive content to the passive versions of the same videos," says Ruben. "Ideally, interactive experiences will eventually replace passive viewing time altogether." k

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DEBATE

Do kids today have more agency than in the past?

Children's media experts David Kleeman and Peter Robinson weigh in.

YES

BY: DAVID KLEEMAN

With a hat tip to The Who: "The kids are alright." Today's young people create games, videos, TikToks, fan art and fiction. Confronted with a pandemic that isolated them from friends, they adopted and adapted digital platforms to sustain their social lives. They control more discretionary money than any previous cohort, and they want to spend it on brands and experiences that engage with and listen to them.

In short, Gen Z and Gen Alpha not only want agency in their media, technology and entertainment—they expect it.

WHAT IS AGENCY?

We're still primarily in a web2, centralized world, where platform companies own the tools of production, avenues of distribution and users' data. Web3 will someday have amazing potential to return agency to users, but it's too early for kids to be safe in decentralized worlds.

Agency is not absolute. Kids need support to build a foundation for exploration and responsible risk-taking in digital spaces. Beyond tech and regulatory solutions, teaching critical literacy is needed across all media industries, and from parents and educators.

FANDOM, CONNECTED

Youth have a long history of exerting agency over their favorite things, making stories and characters, toys and games their own through their play, dress and creativity.

But there was a time when sharing that fandom was limited to a child's physical community. As a kid, if I wore a Davy Crockett cap and my friend donned a Superman cape, the roleplay hit a wall.

NO

BY: PETER ROBINSON

Young people are incredibly invested, both in their own development and in the world around them. But so much of this is out of their hands—and that's something I'd like to change.

I would argue that despite the potential access to more information than ever before, they actually have less agency than previous young generations. (The word "potential" is intentional and important.)

First, let's talk about what agency means. The dictionary definition is, "the ability to take action, or choose what action to take." But in order to do this, you need:

1. Awareness (because you can't act on something you know nothing about);
2. Comprehension (because understanding something's relevance to you provides the motivation and rationale for action); and
3. The ability and/or desire to act.

Many movements have been inspired by young generations challenging norms and taking action, including Black rights, women's suffrage, anti-war movements and even punk. But today's young people face barriers to agency that are not as clear-cut.

AWARENESS

Young people have access to so much information, but it is largely fed to them by powerful forces—algorithm-powered mega-plaforms, brands with hungry bottom lines, and influencers seeking "engagement." (Thankfully, educators still play a role in this, too.)

These forces put agency in peril: How can you reasonably filter when there is so much noise?



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YES If you brought Star Wars action figures to a playdate and I brought Masters of the Universe, we needed to compromise (not a bad thing). But when the internet arrived, fans could share their fiction and art with a more global community.

Today's youth sit on the cusp between web2's massive social reach and web3's fan-centric, user-generated communities. Older kids and teens immerse themselves in the spaces they need to support their self-expression—often around IPs or brands. But more importantly, they find communities where they can express their authentic selves, in ways not always possible in real life.

BUILDERS, NOT JUST USERS

Empowering creation with powerful tools also builds agency. Young people are no longer just consumers or users; they're builders. YouTube videos, TikToks, Roblox games, Fortnite Creative islands, Minecraft constructions, fan art and fiction—there have never been more ways to bring one's dreams to life. The rapid rise of generative AI engines enables pretty much anyone to produce high-quality game art and, soon, animation.

For some young people, just the act of creation is powerful. Others build to only share with friends and family.

A small percentage seek to tap into the massive global audience, and a lucky few find fame and fortune. They have a willing audience—under-18s now watch as many minutes on YouTube, TikTok and Twitch as they do on Netflix, Prime, Hulu and Disney+. Current estimates are that within the next decade, one million people will earn their living from the metaverse, and another 100 million will build for fun.

This projection levels up the importance of early agency from "nice to have" for expressive play or hobbies, to "must have" for developing the builders and creators of the future. At Dubit, we are hiring older teens and young 20-somethings to build metaverse experiences. These native users of Roblox, Core, Fortnite, Discord and other powerful platforms learned coding out of an intrinsic interest in making what they and their friends wanted to play. Pairing them with experienced builders who understand team-building, client service and working to deadlines results in symbiotic mentoring.

INDUSTRY'S RESPONSIBILITY

Young people have more agency than ever before, but that doesn't relieve us of our professional obligation to make high-quality, thoughtful, age-appropriate, innovative content for linear and interactive media. Our work provides seeds for their creativity, along with an invitation to bring an expansive, "what if" vision to the table. K



Strategist, analyst, author and speaker David Kleeman has worked in children's media for more than 35 years. He is SVP of global trends at metaverse studio and research consultancy Dubit.

NO Recently, a child spoke with us about the influx of branded content onto platforms like Roblox, stating, "adults have messed up the real world, and have now come to Roblox to do the same."

Social gaming platforms have been natural havens for niche communities, rule-breakers and boundary-pushers for years, with keen young people rapidly adopting and deploying new game-based tools. But inevitably, those same havens attract adult attention, and the brands are never far behind.

RELEVANCE

This stage is critical to comprehension. We can all act, but having an understanding of why it's important (to you or others) is crucial to achieving full agency. With so much misinformation and brand noise, it can be hard to distinguish fact from fiction. To find and retain agency, it helps if it has meaning.

Media literacy in schools helps, but we are facing another major evolution in online media—web3—and once again, our approach will need to adapt. If web3 develops in a decentralized manner, it will provide spaces for expression without filters and brand noise.

If it doesn't—which I suspect will be the case—then tools for filtering relevance and information will be key.

ABILITY TO ACT

You need to know what to do and how to do it. But even wanting to act is hard without "scaffolding." This is shorthand for support—providing kids with a framework that fosters agency instead of restricting it.

For example, KidsKnowBest did a study on sustainability two years ago, and found that the difference between action and comprehension was a system that supported a child to go from awareness (repeated prompts), to comprehension (multiple conversations and practical education), to action (lowered barriers to sustainable behaviors), culminating in rewards for positive behavior.

Agency and sustainable behaviors are most clearly demonstrated by circular communities, which the European Week for Waste Reduction defines as when "individual citizens and the wider community are engaged, invested and see local value and benefit in pursuing zero waste and circular activities." In such a system, the reward is part of the action.

Children can have degrees of agency, if they can find what matters and how to act. It is our duty to design the scaffolding now to ensure that future generations have the agency that young activists in the 1960s, for example, had and used for the benefit of society.

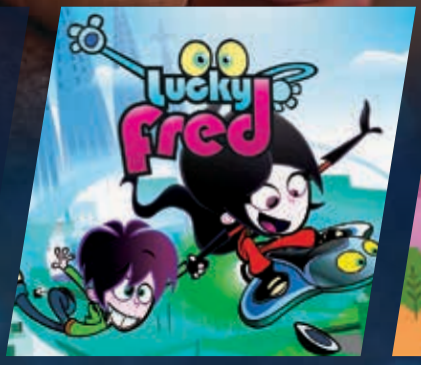
The kids of this generation will be building the platforms of the next one, and we have a unique opportunity to help them. K



A researcher and commentator on kids and family trends, Peter Robinson is Chief Strategy Officer at KidsKnowBest, a kids and family research and marketing agency.



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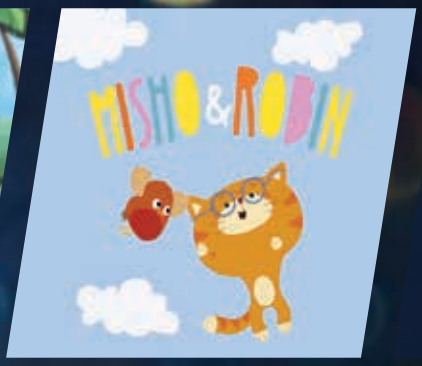






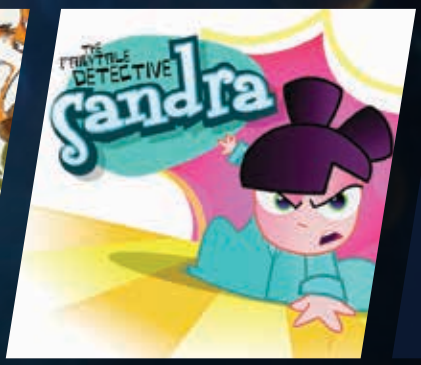












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COOL NEW SHOWS

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The industry is back in Miami this month for Kidscreen Summit 2023, with a wide range of pitches looking for financing and partners. Among the latest new shows on our radar are a French queen-in-waiting story with an action-packed twist, and a concept about a nanny who is also a buffalo.

BY: RYAN TUCHOW



3 to 5

Dinospital

Producer: Superprod (France)
Style: CG animation
Format: 57 x seven minutes
Budget: US$550,000 per half hour
Status: Superprod is shoring up broadcasters, distributors, co-producers and financing. A bible and two scripts are ready to pitch.
Delivery: Fall 2024

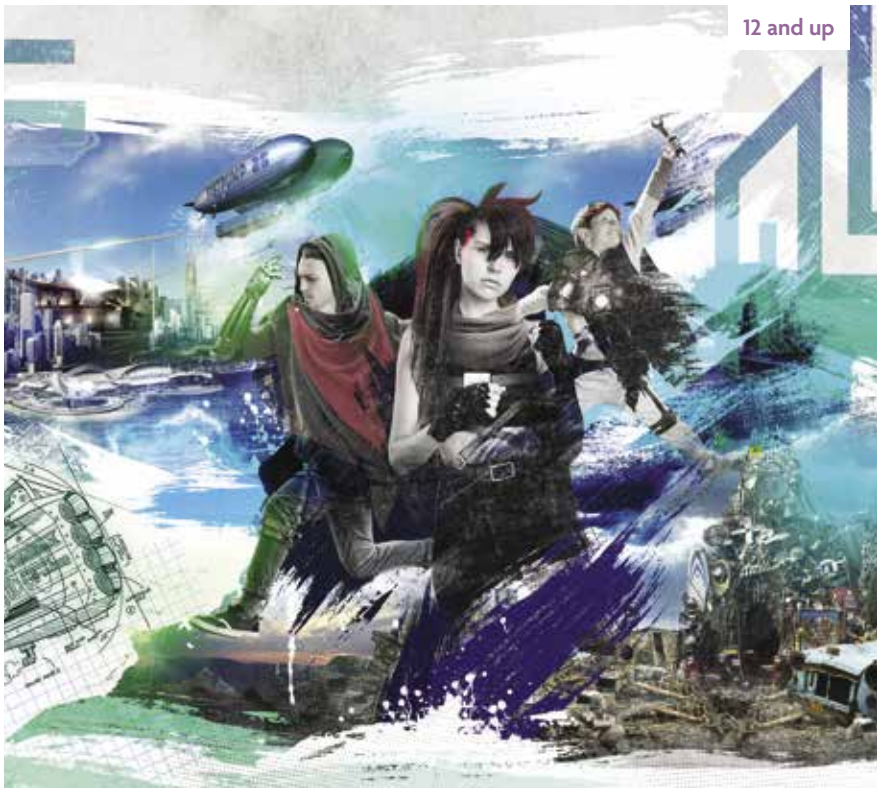
Dinosaurs meet doctors in this new preschool comedy from creator Patrick Ermosilla *(Pat the Dog)* about two young kids and their grandmother, a vet whose patients are prehistoric creatures. While she's busy applying dino-sized bandages and casts, Scratch and Flint play and learn at the clinic, helping her patients overcome their fears and mistakes.



Marie-Antoinette

Producer: Zephyr Animation (France)
Style: 2D animation
Format: 26 x 22 minutes
Budget: US$8.8 million
Status: A bible and pilot script are ready, with additional visual assets in development. APC Kids, which owns Zephyr, is managing presales as the series distributor.
Delivery: Q2 2025

In this action-driven series concept, 14-year-old Marie Antoinette longs for adventure and freedom from the responsibilities of French royal court. Her life changes when she uncovers a conspiracy connected to the death of her father, and a set of magical stones that must not fall into the wrong hands. Marie runs away from a marriage that would make her queen in order to travel the world—even journeying to the lost city of Atlantis—in search of the stones that will help her stop an ancient power from taking over the world.



FistPump

Producer: Distortion Productions (UK)
Style: Live action and animation
Format: Seven x 24 minutes
Budget: US$750,000 to US$1 million per episode
Status: A one-sheet, bible, scripts, artwork and a three-season breakdown of story arcs are available. The next step is to secure broadcasters and co-production partners.
Delivery: 12 to 18 months from start of production

This action-adventure series features a young teen who lives in a dystopian world with her little brother. Ronnie has a chance to make a better life for herself when she discovers she has a talent for FistPump, a popular sport in which players power up metal fists and engage them in high-octane aerial battles for fame and fortune. As Ronnie works her way up the ranks to become the world's best FistPump player, she ends up at odds with the powerful and villainous Thump family, and learns the secrets behind her parents' disappearance years earlier.



Aunty B's House

Producer: Headspinner Productions (Canada)
Style: Live action
Format: 20 x seven minutes
Budget: US$1.1 million
Status: In development, with CBC Kids attached as a commissioning broadcaster. Headspinner has a bible and two scripts ready to show.
Delivery: 2023

Producer Khalilah Brooks created and stars in this series about a group of foster kids and their caregiver. In each episode, Aunty B helps her young charges deal with different issues unique to their situation, such as worrying about whether the tooth fairy will find them in a different house. The nurturing matriarch builds a family and home for the kids while teaching them about kindness and love. Brooks has been performing the character of Aunty B in live theater performances across Canada for several years.

Buffalo Nanny

Producer: China Bridge Content (US)
Style: CG animation
Format: 52 x seven minutes
Budget: US$150,000 per episode
Status: A bible, pilot script and theme song are complete, and China Bridge is looking for co-producers, distributors and broadcasters.
Delivery: Q2 2024

This comedy centers around mischievous baby Bebop and her caregiver—a water buffalo named Otis. Every day, they head off to explore a new place, where Bebop always manages to get into trouble, from blasting into space at a rocket launch to leading a stampede of barnyard animals on a farm. Otis has to help her out of these predicaments and bring her safely back home. Husband-and-wife team Chen Chen (*Peaches & Creaminal*) and Josh Selig (*Wonder Pets!*) are the creators of this series.





Moonfall Springs

Producer: Park Star Media (South Korea)
Style: 2D animation
Format: 52 x 11 minutes
Budget: US$6.4 million
Status: In development. A bible and a teaser are available, a pilot script is in the works, and Park Star is seeking co-producers and broadcasters.
Delivery: 18 months after greenlight

Aspiring teen photojournalist and part-time babysitter Prisca is always on the hunt for the most amazing stories. Luckily, two of her charges are supernatural siblings, so adventure is never far away. The trio join forces to solve paranormal mysteries and battle monsters in Prisca's never-ending quest to capture the perfect photo. Park Star is also developing a companion webtoon comic with artist Sandra Diaz (*Supersonic Girl*).

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A Place Called Perfect



Producer: Jellyfish Pictures (UK)
Style: CG animation
Format: Eight x 45 minutes
Budget: TBD
Status: Tom MacCrae (*Doctor Who*) is adapting the trilogy of kids books by Helena Duggan. A bible and series treatment are available.
Delivery: 18 months after greenlight

In this series aimed at a co-viewing audience, 13-year-old Violet moves to a town called Perfect, and quickly realizes that her new home is too good to be true. She discovers that the town's leaders make everyone wear rose-colored glasses, which turns citizens into conformists who think the same way and can't see flaws. As her family changes, she has to uncover the town's many secrets and free everyone from "perfection."



San Misterio

Co-producers: Humberto Cervera, Carlos Sallas and Ari Navarrete (Mexico)
Style: 2D animation
Format: 12 x 11 minutes
Budget: US$75,000 per episode
Status: In development with a bible, finance plan and scripts prepared. The producers are seeking a production partner so they can start pitching to networks. They're planning to publish a comic book based on the pilot episode in early 2023.
Delivery: 18 months after greenlight

This mystery/comedy series features two sisters who make the move from the big city to the town of San Misterio, expecting their new home to be full of magic and wonder. But when they discover that it's just a boring old town, the kids go on a hunt for adventure, finding magical creatures and items that help them slowly bring magic back to the town. Carlos Sallas and Ari Navarrete co-created this series, which is Inspired by Mexican culture and folklore. Humberto Cervera Baron is its writer and executive producer. *San Misterio* won first place at Pixelatl's Ideatoon competition in 2021. k

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QUICK CHANGE

BY: GARY RUSAK

Reshaping the kids content business

Kids content creators and distributors are facing stiff economic headwinds right now, with a threatening recession, rising interest rates, inflation and supply chain disruptions all conspiring to keep revenues down and anxiety high. These pressures are in addition to the ever-shifting sands of conglomeration, increased competition and evolving business models. However, as those with decades of experience in the kids industry will attest, this is not the first downturn, and it won't be the last.

While the economic pressures are reshaping what kind of content is in high demand, and how and where it's being delivered, companies that are agile, flexible and believe in the core value of their work are going to be best able to survive in the risk-averse atmosphere that presents both challenges and opportunities.

"There is so much change at the moment," says Maria Doolan, VP of TV content for Paris-based ZAG Animation, reflecting in December on the general feeling of nervousness in the industry at the close of 2022.

"Everyone is waiting to see what's going to happen with budgets, and who will actually be open to acquiring content," she adds, noting that news of the HBO Max/Discovery+ mega-merger this summer, and then the subsequent belt-tightening and budget-freezing, sent a chill throughout the US and international markets.



One way to survive a downturn is to be in as many places as possible—ZAG's Miraculous IP spans a long list of touchpoints, from its roots as an animated TV series to a themed boat tour on the Seine

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Doolan sees the kids content world as a relatively small industry where little ripples in one area affect everyone else. "There will be a domino effect for producers," she says, "but this happens every eight or nine years or so."

The palpable sense of déjà vu was noted by a number of other industry veterans. "Everything is cyclical," says Genevieve Dexter, founder and CEO of Serious Kids in the UK. "I have been watching the business for 30 years now, and you see these patterns emerge. People might forget, but things weren't too pretty in 2008, either."

Vince Commisso, president and CEO of Toronto's 9 Story Media Group, says economic dips are an organic part of the business. "Every time one of these downturns hits—and we are experiencing a downturn now, there is no doubt—it does get confusing in terms of how to best produce, finance and deliver creative content," he says.

One indication of the unsettled nature of the market is the ongoing re-assessment of a core business model in streaming. A shift is current underway from subscription-based models to ad-supported platforms.

Earlier this year, Netflix announced its intention to offer a "light" AVOD version of its service, in order to make up for the expected revenue shortfall on advertising. This trend can also be seen in the growing power and prominence of ad-supported platforms such as Tubi—a mass-audience AVOD platform that some analysts predict will generate US$1 billion in ad revenue this year alone.

"In the long term, ad-supported business is where the maketplace is going to end up," says Ed Galton, CEO of UK-based distributor CAKE. "Some people double down and say that the world is going to solely rely upon subscription models as a feature of content consumption, [but] I just don't buy it."

While AVOD will play a more prominent role in the near future, Galton says it's unlikely that subscription services will completely fade away. "The vast majority of platforms that exist are going to monetize their content in an ad-supported manner. There will always be subscription models, but there is still a need for businesses to advertise."

And one doesn't have to look far to see content delivery models that are thriving with an old-school reliance on advertising. "Look at how much money Google and YouTube are making off the advertising model," says Galton. Serious Kids' Dexter agrees that AVOD is coming back strong. "I have seen a lot of new platforms that are adopting it," she says.

Specifically, she points to Japan-based Benesse as a possible harbinger of things to come. The relatively new streamer started out as a subscription-based educational platform, but recently rebranded as an AVOD. "In the UK, too, Sky is moving their kids into free-view," Dexter says. "Everyone is adjusting their business models as they go."

Cyma Zarghami, founder and CEO of MiMo Studios in New York, and former president of Nickelodeon and Viacom Media Networks Kids and Family Group, sees the current situation as "in flux" and the return of AVOD as a symptom of change.

"I think the role of FAST channels and the emergence of AVOD is really a sign of a media landscape that is still very much in motion," she says. "It is going to take some time to figure out what it's all going to look like next."

As broadcasters and streamers re-evaluate a key aspect of their business model, perhaps the wisest strategy for IP owners now is to spread their bets far and wide by developing content that can seamlessly play across a number of different platforms.

To build a viable audience amid the fragmentation, producers and distributors have to be adaptable and flexible with content offerings—and that means moving away from the idea of exclusivity.

"There is so much content being produced, and so many platforms bidding on them, that [in the past] there was a tendency to make content exclusive, which doesn't really work for kids audiences," says 9 Story's Commisso. "The more places kids can watch a show, the more every partner benefits."

Halle Stanford, president of television at The Jim Henson Company, says making sure that content can be found on different platforms is one of the best ways to build a viable franchise. "[Our company] doesn't have an overall deal with any one broadcaster or digital platform," she notes. "We love that freedom."



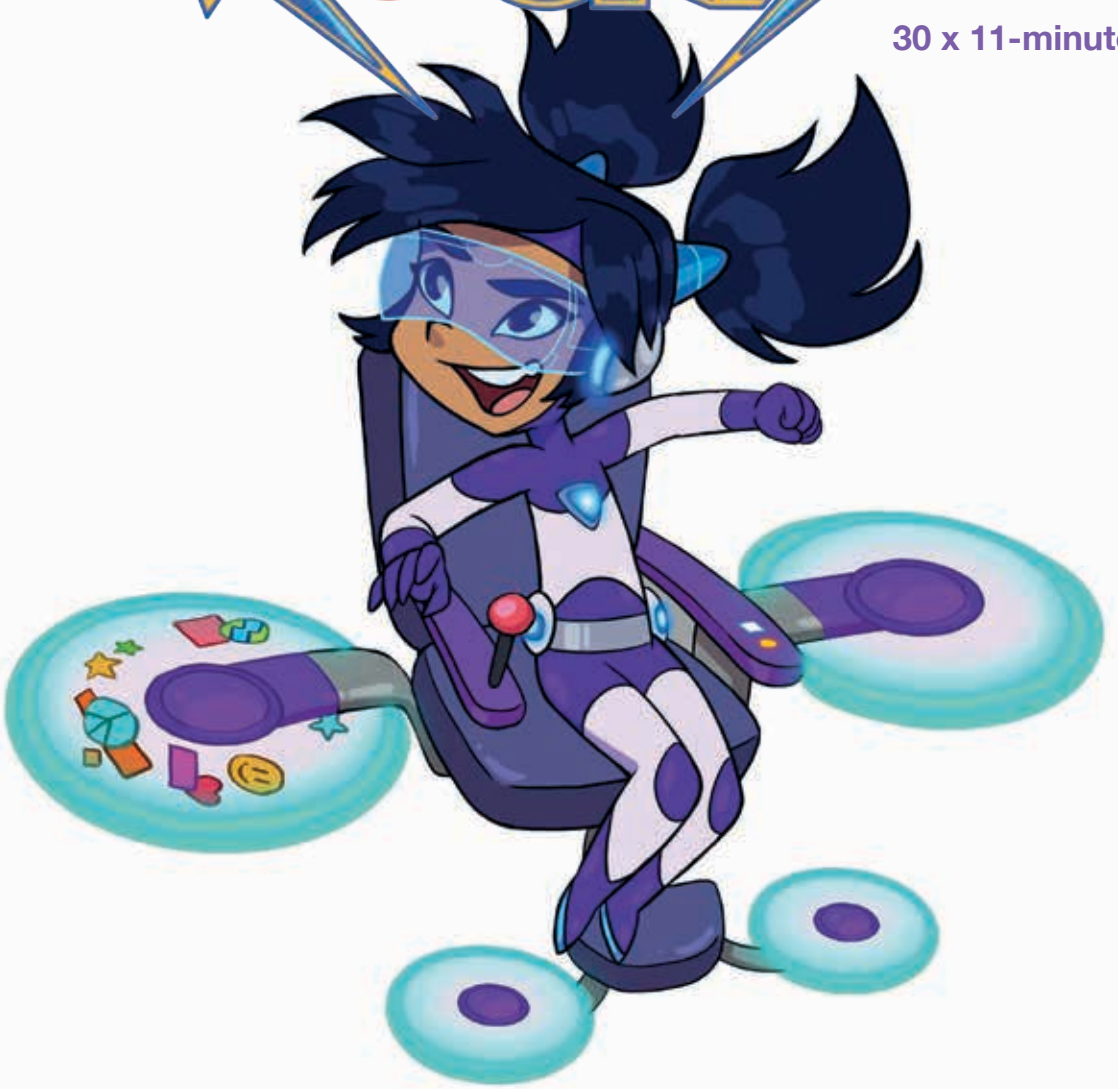
Some analysts predict that ad-supported platform Tubi will generate US$1 billion in ad revenue this year alone

"The more places kids can watch a show, the more every partner benefits."

—Vince Commisso, 9 Story Media Group

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9 Story Media Group has spent the last decade diversifying, including acquiring *Ridley Jones* producer Brown Bag Films



COURTESY OF NETFLIX

"Relegating a specific show to any one platform in this day and age is a brand-killer."

—Ed Galton, CAKE

ZAG's Doolan sees touchpoint diversification as a key driver for the studio's successful Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir franchise. The series at the heart of the IP is currently available in more than 120 countries, and has spawned a robust licensing and merchandising program that has generated more than US$1 billion worldwide to date.

"You need to look at not only multiple platforms within the broadcast environment, but also at all platforms where eyeballs are," says Doolan. "Whether that's YouTube or Roblox, you have to be flexible and produce content that is suited for each of them."

She points out that ZAG has deals for *Miraculous* with Netflix and with terrestrial networks around the world. "We are also producing for game consoles and YouTube," she adds. "From the outset, we are always thinking about how content will slot into different platforms."

Developing content with the flexibility to live in multiple places is also core to MiMo's business strategy, says Zarghami. "We are looking at IPs that can begin anywhere and go anywhere," she says. "We are focused on finding properties that have the legs to be able to do that."

From the distributor's perspective, Galton is a longtime advocate of spreading IPs as widely as possible. "Children's content should not just be on one platform," he says. "Relegating a specific show to any one platform in this day and age is a brand-killer."

Shifts in the broadcasting and streaming environments are also dictating the type of content that's now at a premium. Whether this is a result of cyclical movement or a true sea-change remains to be seen; but the fact is that the market is moving away from productions that appeal to niche audiences, and a preference for kids content that will draw larger, multi-demographic viewers is clearly emerging.

"Over the past few years, some shows super-served a segment of the audience and didn't build a large viewership," says 9 Story's Commisso. "People went down paths that were a bit experimental when there was a real feeding frenzy for content, but that is no longer the case."

The trend towards more mainstream content is directly related to a growing risk aversion among streamers and their parent companies, according to Doolan. "It's minimizing risk so that, from a financial standpoint, it makes sense," she says. "Only in times of abundance can truly niche, creative and amazing shows get made."

MiMo's Zarghami connects the growing appetite for more mainstream content to changes in people's overall viewing habits. "We went full binge-viewing, and we are now back to appointment-viewing," she says, noting that weekly episode drops of prestige series are increasingly becoming the norm. "That pendulum swing didn't take very long to happen, either."

Galton posits that the move away from niche is more than just a trend—it's a consequence of streaming platforms learning more about the best ways to monetize their inventory. With years of data and analytics at their fingertips, streamers are now fine-tuning their expenditures. "They are not making the niche bets that they made two or three years ago," he says. "They now realize that their financial resources should go to productions that will draw as big an audience as possible."

Both producers and distributors had similar advice about how to navigate the quick changes in an increasingly volatile and precarious kids content business. They all agree that the moment to reset and refocus is upon us.

"The great thing about this business is that when it gets confusing, the answer is very simple: Give your head a shake and start all over," says Commisso, adding that 9 Story's philosophy is to shut out the noise and focus on the work. "For a company of our size, a downturn can be traumatic," he says. "But it's not, because we know how to react to it."

He stresses that the key has been keeping the company true to the founding principles that helped it create long-term successful series like *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood, Wild Kratts* and *The Magic School Bus*.

"The work is what we are singularly focused on," Commisso explains. "There is a comfort because we are doing what we are supposed to be doing, and we'll let the machinations of distribution, the down market and interest rates worry about themselves. We are concentrating on what we do best."

ZAG's Doolan has an equally optimistic outlook that is the hard-won result of decades of experience. "As long as you keep pushing, you will find ways to make it work," she says. "You really have to have laser focus and believe in your product, and it will happen."

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DIVERSE CONTENT SHINES

Despite widespread uncertainty caused by cost-cutting at Netflix, Disney and Warner Bros. Discovery, the ever-adaptable children's entertainment biz soldiered on through a difficult year, delivering heaps of high-quality work across the broadcasting, production, distribution, licensing and digital media sectors.

For the 2022 Hot50 ranking, streamer Disney+ claimed its first-ever broadcasting title, bumping rival Netflix out of the number-one spot in the category for the first time since the Hot50 launched nine years ago.

Instrumental to the global success of Disney+ is its growing portfolio of uplifting, inclusive content for kids and families, which expanded further with greenlights for projects such as Out of My Mind, an upcoming movie spotlighting disability awareness based on the best-selling novel by children's author Sharon Draper.

The streamer's other accomplishments included 14 Primetime Emmy wins and better-than-expected worldwide subscriber growth in every quarter of the fiscal year, bringing its total subscriber base to 164.2 million. Streamers, in fact, were more prevalent than ever in the upper rankings of the broadcasting category for 2022, with AppleTV+, Netflix and YouTube Kids placing third, fourth and fifth, respectively.

Elsewhere in the Hot50 landscape, industry voters doubled 9 Story's pleasure by ranking it number one in both production and distribution. This was the company's second consecutive production win, earned on the strength of key DEI achievements including hiring Farrell Hall as its first-ever chief inclusion officer and signing a new partnership with BBC Children's to adapt Elle McNicoll's inclusion-themed book A Kind of Spark into a live-action TV series.

The company's year in distribution was no less outstanding, with 45% growth for its AVOD/FAST channel business, which to date has sold more than 8,600 half hours across Pluto, Tubi and Roku.

In licensing, WildBrain dethroned LEGO from the top spot, thanks in large part to its iconic Peanuts brand, which generated more than US$2.5 billion in global annual product sales in 2021.

Rounding out the categories, Sesame Workshop jumped seven spots on the digital media list to unseat previous winner PBS KIDS. The Workshop's achievements this year included the launch of Learn with Sesame Street, a new app developed in partnership with edtech company BEGiN that helps children explore their emotions while learning foundational early literacy, math and critical thinking skills.

Congratulations to all of the 2022 number-ones, to Hot50 first-timers such as Pipeline Studios, Headspinner Productions and LEGO Creative Play Lab, and to the rest of the finalists. Keep the momentum going in 2023!—Jeremy Dickson

BROADCASTING



1

Disney+ stands alone

Driven by better-than-expected subscriber growth and a raft of Emmy wins, the streamer earns its first Hot50 crown.

After sharing the spotlight with perennial category champ Netflix in 2021, Disney+ takes the number-one ranking solo for the first time.

From a subscriber growth perspective, the streamer beat subscription estimates in every quarter last year. During Q4, subscriptions increased by 39% to 12.1 million, bringing the platform's total subscriber base to 164.2 million and helping to lift Disney's overall direct-to-consumer quarterly revenue by 8% to US$4.9 billion.

The company is forecasting profits by 2024, with a revenue boost expected this year from a new lower-priced Disney+ ad tier that launched in December and a price bump to the service's existing ad-free tier.

Creatively, the streamer took home 14 Emmy Awards in 2021, including seven trophies for *The Mandalorian* and three for *WandaVision*.

In upcoming Disney+ content, some notable streamer-specific greenlights over the last year include *Young Jedi Adventures*, Lucasfilm's first full-length animated Star Wars series for preschoolers; *Out of My Mind*, a movie spotlighting disability awareness; and *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, a new live-action fantasy-adventure series based on Rick Riordan's best-selling book franchise.

The company is also banking on the return of previous longtime CEO Bob Iger and his creative-first approach to fuel greater optimism. Iger will lead Disney for the next two years after a surprise return to the C-suite following the November exit of his replacement, Bob Chapek.

Iger, who steered the company's move into streaming, told employees in a December Town Hall that the company must shift toward making its streaming business profitable rather than upping its subscriber count.



2

PBS KIDS

The US pubcaster is creeping closer to number one on the strength of popular new shows and the celebrated end of its longest-running animated kids series ever. Since 1996, *Arthur*'s titular aardvark has adventured with his friends and family through more than 250 episodes, and PBS KIDS marked the beloved show's 25th anniversary with a content marathon, including new eps in the final season that revealed the characters as grown-ups. Animated preschool series *Alma's Way* consistently ranked among PBS KIDS' top-10 shows in streaming viewership every month, according to the pubcaster, earning it a second-season greenlight in August. And new short-form series *Jelly, Ben & Pogo* also performed well, engaging a Filipino-American audience with stories infused with Filipino culture.



AppleTV+

The streamer jumped from 10th place on the 2021 list all the way up to third following a flurry of series commissions. New animated book adaptations include *Pretzel and the Puppies* (HarperCollins Productions) and *Get Rolling with Otis* (9 Story), while live-action orders went to projects including *Puppy Place* (Scholastic), *Yo Gabba Gabba!* (WildBrain) and *Amber Brown* (Boat Rocker Media). Apple also greenlit a new animated preschool series from Spin Master based on its popular *Sago Mini Friends* app.

Netflix

Despite missing top honors for the first time in the Hot50's nine-year history, the streamer still had a big year, driven by top-performing new shows such as *Heartstopper* (a Rose d'Or Award-winning live-action series spotlighting LGBTQ+ love that was a top-10 hit in 54 countries); director Jorge Gutierrez's Annie Award-winning animated series *Maya and the Three*; and *Ada Twist, Scientist*, an animated preschool series and NAACP Image Award nominee from Chris Nee's Laughing Wild, Higher Ground Productions, Wonder Worldwide and Brown Bag Films.





YouTube Kids

YouTube's kids content experienced big viewership increases in 2022, earning it a spot on the Hot50 broadcasting list for the first time. According to a new report from United Talent Agency, total viewing time for the platform's top 10 kids channels rose by 15% for the first six months of the year, and kids content outstripped all other genres in YouTube watch time. Among acquisitions and orders, YouTube notably signed an exclusive deal with Cyber Group Studios for *Giganto Club*, the French prodco's first real-time and digital-first animated series, and greenlit B17's *The Big Tiny Food Face-Off*.

CBC Kids

The Canadian pubcaster ranked solidly again on the back of new show commissions, hires and partnerships. Key moves included greenlights for preschool series *Mittens and Pants* (Windy Isle Productions, Thunderbird Entertainment) and *Jeremy and Jazzy* (Vérité Films); the addition of former eOne exec Swin Chang as CBC Kids' newest development and production exec; and the launch of Kindred, a partnership with ABC Australia to find and fund animated content for preschoolers and tweens.



TVOKids

To help bring more exposure to diverse voices, TVOKids commissioned series from BIPOC-led companies Big Bad Boo (*16 Hudson*), Lopii Productions (*My Home My Life*) and Pillango Productions (*Step by Step Let's Dance*). In originals, *Curious Crafting* and *Five Ingredients Challenge* both debuted in 2022, and TVOKids channels launched on smart TV streaming services including Roku and Apple TV, expanding the network's digital-first efforts.



7



8

BBC Children's

It was a pivotal year at the British pubcaster, with BBC Children's In-House Productions folding into BBC Studios Productions (now called BBC Studios Kids & Family) in order to increase the commercial arm's financial returns by 30% within five years. Re-org aside, the pubcaster made a number of key commissions for CBeebies, CBBC and iPlayer, including *The Junior Eurovision Song Contest, A Kind of Spark, Olga Da Polga, Supertato* and *Football Academy*. The Beeb also greenlit season three of CBeebies animated series *Pablo*, which has a new look and narrative focus to resonate with all kid viewers, not just those on the autism spectrum.

Nickelodeon

The ViacomCBS-owned cablenet leaned into viral talent, sports and one of its most iconic shows last year. Leveraging its Slime Cup brand, Nick greenlit new hour-long golf special *Nickelodeon Slime Cup*, ordered more *NFL Slimetime* content, and broadcast *Nickelodeon NFL Nickmas Game* featuring the Denver Broncos and Los Angeles Rams on Christmas Day. The kidsnet also launched its new buddy comedy series *That Girl Lay Lay*, starring viral phenom Alaya High, and celebrated the 25th anniversary of *Blue's Clues* with a year-long multi-platform campaign.



9



10

WildBrain

Canada's WildBrain Television had a fab year, led by the premiere of Lopii Productions' drag entertainer storytime series for preschoolers, *The Fabulous Show with Fay and Fluffy*. WildBrain also championed Canadian producers with 10 greenlights, including *Ruby and the Well* and *Life with Luca* (Shaftesbury), *Take Note* (Lambur Productions), *Lucas the Spider* (Fresh TV) and *Summer Memories* (Aircraft Pictures).

PRODUCTION



9 Story locks up production honors again

The media company and its production arm score back-to-back wins in the category.

Lightning has struck twice for 9 Story Media Group/Brown Bag Films, which took the top spot in the Hot50's production category for a second year in a row. It was a big year for the studio's new live-action division, which delivered *Hello, Jack!* to Apple TV+ and is now producing book adaptation *A Kind of Spark* for CBBC.

The company hired its first-ever chief inclusion officer, Farrell Hall, to oversee its diversity strategy, and has pledged to be carbon-neutral by 2025 through a three-phase plan to measure, reduce and offset its emissions.

"It means a tremendous amount for all of our staff to be acknowledged in this way," says Cathal Gaffney, managing director of Brown Bag Films and COO of 9 Story Media Group. "In 2022, we produced our first live-action show, and we are well on the road to becoming a carbon-neutral studio. Our teams work hard to foster an environment where career progression can thrive, and having the opportunity to see our people create, develop and direct their own shows is always exciting. Ultimately, it's about enjoying the process of producing quality shows—we love animation, and having a great culture is at the heart of it all."



Aardman

Aardman returns to the top-10 producers list, capping off a busy year that saw it launch new series *The Very Small Creatures* on Sky Kids, as well as *The Flight Before Christmas* on Netflix and the BBC. The British studio also produced the short *Our Planet Now Winning*, based on a child's idea, which it premiered for world leaders at the UN Climate Change Conference COP26. This is in addition to taking home a British Animation Award for its Netflix movie *Robin, Robin* and lining up a new feature film with *Bend it Like Beckham* director Gurinder Chadha.

DreamWorks Animation

DreamWorks had a lot to celebrate last year. Its feature *The Bad Guys* was a hit, earning more than US$250 million worldwide, according to Box Office Mojo. (The film was also the first project greenlit by new president Margie Cohn, who stepped into the role in 2019.) In TV news, Netflix has ordered six seasons of its popular preschool series *Gabby's Dollhouse*. And on *Madagascar: A Little Wild*, the studio brought in ASL and deaf representation experts, and featured a voice actor who is hearing-impaired.



3

Blue Zoo Animation Studio

Blue Zoo got a B Corporation certification last year—meaning it meets certain standards around sustainability and transparency—after committing to reduce its carbon footprint and increase corporate transparency. It also opened new digital and licensing branches to create and build out original IPs. Meanwhile, *The Adventures of Paddington* and *Numberblocks* are growing their audiences, and Netflix has ordered Blue Zoo's comedy series *Big Tree City*.



5



4

Daily Madness Productions

Ireland's Daily Madness marked the year with a company-wide strategy to bring more diversity to its projects through internships and hiring programs. New team members will be hard at work in 2023, producing animated comedy *Goat Girl* for Warner Bros. Discovery, KiKA and VRT, and preschool series *Ray of Sunshine* for RTÉJr. This is Daily Madness's second year at number four in the Hot50 ranking.



6

Sinking Ship Entertainment

The Toronto-based prodco started production on *Beyond Black Beauty* for delivery in 2023 on Amazon's AVOD platform Freevee. And production has wrapped in Kenya on *Jane*, Sinking Ship's most ambitious series to date, produced with the Jane Goodall Institute for Apple TV+. The company's first CG-animated series, *Builder Brothers Dream Factory*, is also set to deliver in 2023.



7

Atomic Cartoons

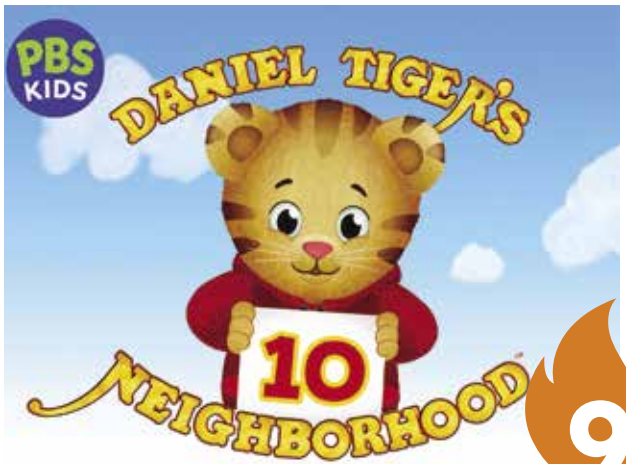
The studio animated 17 projects in 2022, including Marvel's *Spidey and His Amazing Friends* and *My Little Pony*. It also delivered season two of *Molly of Denali* to PBS KIDS, and is developing and producing *Oddballs* with Netflix. Speaking of Netflix, the studio developed, produced and sold preschool-skewing book adaptation *Princess Power* to the streamer for a 2023 debut.

Ludo Studio

The ongoing strength of *Bluey* brought Australia's Ludo Studio back into the top 10 after a year away. This wildly popular preschool toon has racked up more than 480 million views on ABC and iview in Australia, and the brand is seeing success with an album and books. Beyond the blue heeler, ABC Australia renewed Ludo's *Strange Chores* for a third season.



8



9

Fred Rogers Productions

Fred Rogers Productions built out three successful shows in 2022. PBS KIDS renewed *Donkey Hodie* and *Alma's Way* for second seasons, and both IPs are expanding with albums and books. Last but not least, *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*, which generates more than 47 million streams per month on the PBS KIDS app, celebrated its 10th anniversary with a new one-hour movie.

Pipeline Studios

Making its Hot50 debut, the Canadian prodco is fresh off the launch of PBS KIDS' *Elinor Wonders Why* and *Alma's Way*, and is producing *Work It Out Wombats* with GBH Kids for an upcoming US premiere. Meanwhile, Pipeline's original preschool series *Doggyworld* is making a splash on Disney Junior and Disney+ in Latin America, and its feature film division is working with Nickelodeon on the latest SpongeBob movie.

10



DISTRIBUTION



9 Story takes the crown

More inclusive content and AVOD growth drove the Irish distributor's success.

9 Story Distribution International returns to the top spot after being a runner-up last year. In 2022, it focused on neurodivergent and LGBTQ+ characters, casts and crews. And buyers took notice, with CBBC greenlighting its new live-action series *A Kind of Spark*, based on the same-name book by Elle McNicoll, who is neurodivergent.

"For us, receiving votes from our community is the highest accolade we could wish for," says Alix Wiseman, SVP of distribution and acquisitions. "We are very proud to have closed 9 Story's first landmark deal with CBBC for *A Kind of Spark*, which is not only the first show out of the gate from our new live-action division, but our first series where 50% of the cast and crew are neurodivergent." Wiseman also highlights an upcoming new series that "features a same-sex couple and their child, and models diverse family structures."

In other sales activity, 9 Story inked 19 deals for *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* last year—including a localized version for the BBC—bringing the iconic series' reach to 180-plus territories in total. The distributor also grew its AVOD/FAST channel by 45%, and now boasts more than 8,600 half hours across Pluto, Tubi and Roku.



WildBrain

Toronto-based WildBrain had another successful year of kids content sales to linear, PVOD, AVOD and FAST platforms. In particular, the company inked multiple streaming deals for series including *Yo Gabba Gabba!* (Apple TV+), *Degrassi* (HBO Max), *Caillou* (Peacock), *Strawberry Shortcake* and *Chip and Potato* (Netflix). It also acquired distribution rights to third-party titles *Jungle Beat* (Sunrise Animation Studios), *Carmen Sandiego* (HarperCollins Productions), *Ruby and the Well* (Shaftesbury) and *Summer Memories* (Aircraft Pictures).

Jetpack Distribution

London-based Jetpack had a very strong year, selling more than 2,600 half hours of programming through 125 deals in 150 territories, including China, Germany and CEE. Jetpack's portfolio also grew considerably as a result of new partnerships with 48 producers, which added 55 titles, including *Mechamato, Mimi's World, DreaMARS* and *Biff & Chip*.





Aardman

Fourth-ranked Aardman gained momentum last year by securing multiple key deals, including a presale of animated series *Interstellar Ella* to Warner Bros. Discovery EMEA; and 11 licensing deals for its first toddler series, *The Very Small Creatures*, within six months of its release. Aardman also picked up worldwide distribution rights to Eagle Eye Drama's CBBC-commissioned series *Quentin Blake Box of Treasures*.

Hasbro/eOne

Hasbro/eOne returns to the Hot50 distribution top 10 on the strength of sales growth for its iconic franchises. After premiering globally on Netflix, *My Little Pony: A New Generation* became the most popular show in the platform's kids catalogue in 86 countries, while ViacomCBS snapped up CG-animated series *Transformers Earth Spark*. Hasbro/eOne also closed 105 distribution deals for *Peppa Pig*, and 45 more for *PJ Masks*, with both linear and non-linear channels.





Sesame Workshop

In 2022, the Workshop expanded its content partnership with Warner Bros. Discovery to bring more of its latest animated series to HBO Max, including *Sesame Street, Mecha Builders*, *Bea's Block* and its version of family classic *Charlotte's Web*. The company also expanded its global presence with distribution partners Super RTL (Germany), Warner Bros. Discovery (Latin America) and UNext (Japan). And it's building a new Sesame-branded early learning content hub with Discovery Education.

BBC Studios Kids & Family

BBC Studios Kids & Family's first-ever Hot50 distribution ranking can be attributed to the ongoing worldwide growth of its hugely popular series *Bluey*. In August, season three premiered on Disney+ and Disney Junior in the US, and the show launched in 60-plus additional countries last year. The Beeb's commercial arm also signed several new deals for *Bluey* with linear channels in Europe and APAC, including Rai Yoyo (Italy), France 5, DR Ramasjang (Denmark), SVT (Sweden), RTÉjr (Ireland), ERT (Greece) and EBS (South Korea).



Boat Rocker Media

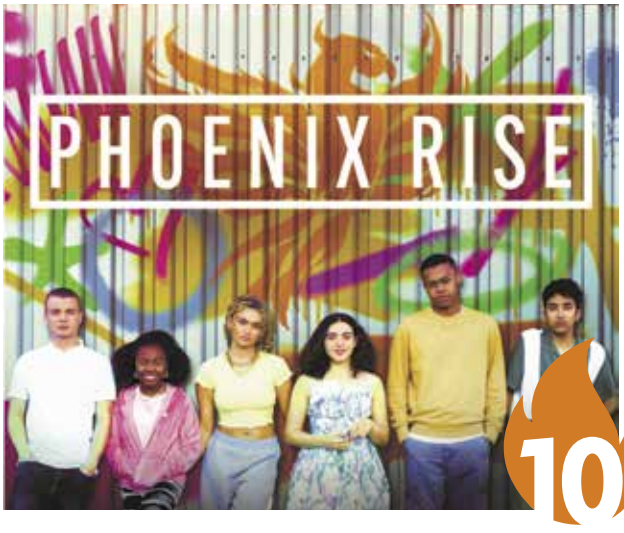
Boat Rocker put its distribution skills to the test last year, expanding the footprint of its flagship CG-animated preschool series *Dino Ranch* to more than 170 countries worldwide. The show, which now airs in more than 15 languages, debuted on several leading broadcasters in 2022, including Disney in Japan and Australia; TinyPop in the UK; and Super RTL in Germany. Boat Rocker's distribution team also closed a multi-platform deal with Warner Bros. Discovery for seasons five to eight of live-action teen drama *The Next Step*.





CAKE Entertainment

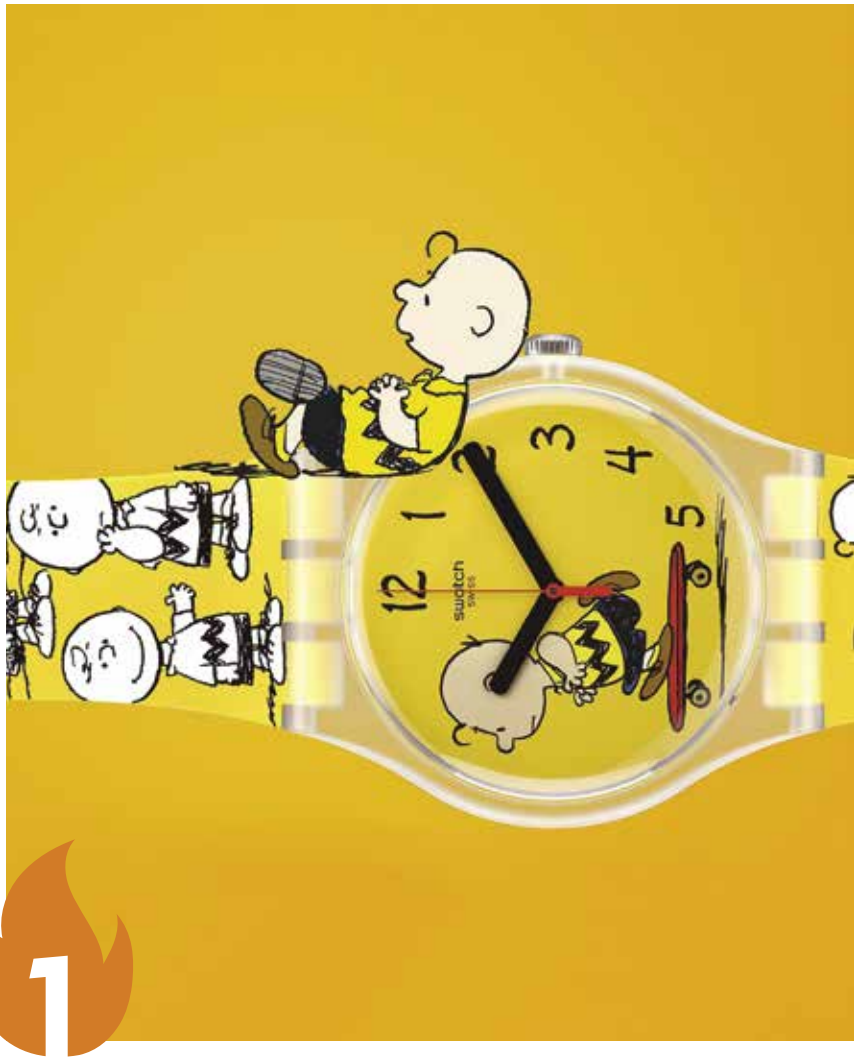
The London-based distributor brought its preschool series *Kiri and Lou* to US audiences on Nick Jr., and expanded its presence in Latin America with sales of more than 750 episodes from series such as *Total Drama Island*, *Trunk Train* and *My Knight and Me* to Warner Bros. Discovery and US Hispanic channel Canela TV. CAKE and Kickstart Entertainment's joint-venture, CakeStart Entertainment, also started production on its first multi-camera comedy (*Pretty Freekin Scary*) for Disney.



Sinking Ship Entertainment

The Toronto-based producer/distributor acquired distribution rights to its new live-action drama BBC co-production *Phoenix Rise,* as well as Lopii Productions' educational preschool series *The Fabulous Show with Fay & Fluffy*. Sinking Ship also closed several key sales for its established hits, selling educational series *Odd Squad* to France TV and HBO Max LatAm, and *Dino Dana* to Beijing-based SVOD Youku.

LICENSING



WildBrain takes the Shortcake

The company's CPLG business unseats LEGO from the category's top spot.

Dethroning The LEGO Group in licensing is none other than Toronto-based WildBrain. It was a huge year for the entertainment company's wholly owned CPLG business, which launched a new expansion in the APAC region and generated more than US$2.5 billion in global annual product sales in 2021 with its iconic Peanuts brand.

Additionally, the YouTube and Netflix relaunch of *Strawberry Shortcake* helped drive a wide CP program fueled by key licensees including global master toy partner Moose Toys; Penguin Random House for publishing in North America; and Bentex for US apparel. Meanwhile, the Teletubbies celebrated their 25th anniversary in style with new Pride-themed activations, an audition on *Britain's Got Talent* and a lighting ceremony at the Empire State Building.

"This is a deeply rewarding accolade, especially as our industry is full of talented and collaborative people doing great things to innovate around IPs," says Eric Ellenbogen, WildBrain's CEO. "This recognition from our peers and partners underscores the value that our licensing expertise brings to brand management, and speaks to the work that our talented teams have been doing this past year to channel great creative work and unlock the potential of our and our partners' brands."

The LEGO Group

It may have lost the first-place crown, but The LEGO Group continues to dominate in the licensing category. The Danish brickmaker racked up several Toy of the Year (TOTY) Awards last February, including Construction Toy of the Year for its 3,772-piece LEGO Marvel Spider-Man Daily Bugle kit and Playset of the Year for its LEGO rendition of Boba Fett's iconic Starship from Star Wars. Rounding out its annual achievements, the company inked a new multi-year deal with subscription service Amazon Kids+ for its latest CG-animated adventure series *LEGO Monkie Kid*, which includes the first two seasons of the show, a pair of specials and a range of tie-in playsets.





The Pokémon Company International

The Pokémon Company International makes its debut in the Hot 50's licensing category in third spot, thanks to a wide range of 25th-anniversary brand activations and partnerships. These include teaming up with consumer and lifestyle brands such as Levi's and Uniqlo for new lines of apparel; delivering a suite of limited-time promotions through McDonald's and General Mills; and launching a steady stream of product releases alongside Pokémon's toy licensees Jazwares and Mattel. The strength of the brand's licensing programs also earned the company License of the Year honors at the 2022 Toy of the Year (TOTY) Awards.

Spin Master

Spin Master's superhero strength as a DC Comics licensee did much to help the Toronto-based toyco retain its number-four ranking. On the heels of the retail launch of its Batman-branded action figures and transforming playset, Spin Master renewed its multi-year licensing deal with Warner Bros. Consumer Products and secured a new master toy license with Skydance Animation. This year will see the launch of a new range of dolls and vehicles based on Apple TV+'s upcoming CG-animated fantasy/musical *Spellbound*.





9 Story Brands

9 Story Brands makes its Hot50 debut at number five, showing that diversity is good business with its global Karma's World licensing program. To date, the CP division has signed on more than 50 licensees worldwide for the IP's retail push, including Scholastic for publishing and Mattel for a new line of dolls with authentic textured hair. The company has also partnered with Black female-led companies such as CurlyKids HairCare to bolster representation in the CP space.

Funko

Funko returns to the Hot50, dropping neatly into the sixth spot. Collectibles remain the Washington-based toyco's bread and butter, and 2022 saw it expand its iconic Pop! vinyl figure brand into new categories including collectible greeting cards and limited-edition soda cans. Funko also launched the Pops! With Purpose toy line, which links up some of the world's most beloved licensed characters with philanthropic orgs such as the Make-A-Wish Foundation and RIVET.



Aardman

The viral success of Aardman's iconic stop-motion duo Wallace & Gromit helped lock in the British prodco's ranking, after racking up millions of views on TikTok with a 3D Gromit Mug by UK-based gift shop Half Moon Bay. Rounding out the year, the British animation studio launched a new publishing program with UK-based Macmillan Children's Books for its latest musical IP Robin Robin, and created a new range of branded Wallace & Gromit dog outfits with Urban Pup.

7





8

Sesame Workshop

The Workshop unveiled plans to return to the toy aisle this year, inking a multi-territory deal with Florida-based Just Play to manufacture and distribute a new range of Sesame Street toys for preschoolers starting in 2023. Building on its existing theme park ventures, the non-profit opened Sesame Place San Diego—the first Sesame theme park on the West Coast—and launched a series of Sesame Street-branded educational play centers in South Korea.

Mattel

Despite slipping a few spots from its last Hot50 ranking, Mattel still had the power to drive new demand for its fandom-fueled brand Masters of the Universe. The LA-based toyco brought home the Action Figure of the Year TOTY Award for its new range of Masterverse toys last February, and launched a new He-Man Roblox game in April. It also posted a strong Q2, growing total net sales for its action figures, building sets and games to US$1.2 billion (up 20% from 2021). And in executive moves, Mattel named Disney vet Josh Silverman as its new global head of consumer products and chief franchise officer.

9





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Jazwares

Jazwares rounds out the licensing category with several of the industry's hottest licenses in its portfolio, including Fortnite, Roblox and CoComelon. Now ranked as the fifth-largest toyco in the US by the NPD Group, Jazwares is responding to rising consumer demand for its original Squishmallows plush line by expanding the IP with two new powerhouse licensing partners—Disney and Pokémon.

DIGITAL MEDIA


Photo by Zach Hyman

1

Sesame puts digital learning to work

The Workshop dethrones reigning champ PBS KIDS with an inclusive and educational strategy.

Moving up seven spots, Sesame Workshop earns top billing in digital media this year, breaking the hold PBS KIDS has had on the category since 2019.

Since January 2022, the nonprofit has sought out digital paths to serve up its educational content and bring fans closer than ever to their favorite Muppets. Last spring, Sesame's official YouTube channel rolled out short-form series *Word of the Day* (under the Coming Together racial justice initiative), along with a first-episode sneak peek of STEM-focused toon *Mecha Builders*. By fall, Sesame had teamed up with New York-based edtech company BEGiN to launch SEL-based and research-backed app *Learn with Sesame*.

"The goal of our digital content offering is to deepen connections with families by creating unique and dynamic ways for them to engage with Sesame Street," says Whit Higgins, SVP of international media and education and distribution. "We're continuing the tradition of meeting kids where they are with authentic and meaningful stories, trailers and songs that keep them laughing and learning [while] making a positive impact in the communities we serve."



2

PBS KIDS

The US pubcaster continued its audio entertainment push by renewing podcasts *Molly of Denali* and *Pinkalicious and Peterrific* and launching *The Arthur Podcast* in the fall to give fans new stories about the beloved animated aardvark in a fresh format. PBS KIDS also stood out with efforts to increase accessibility and diversity in its digital content, adding bilingual offerings to both its video and gaming apps. Additionally, Emmy-winning web series *PBS KIDS Talk About* tackled topics like the pandemic and coping with change at school.

Moonbug Entertainment

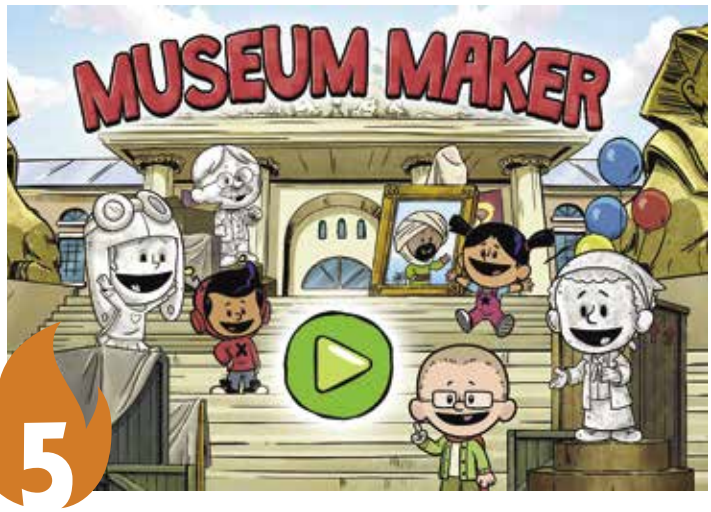
In its first year under Candle Media's ownership, Moonbug has continued to grow its vast portfolio of digital brands, adding nursery rhyme network Little Angel (88 million YouTube subscribers) and Singapore prodco One Animation, the producer of Emmy-nominated series *Oddbods* (19 million YouTube subscribers). The company also adopted an NFT strategy, launching tokens based on its popular IPs—including CoComelon and Blippi—on kids social media platform Zigazoo.



3

9 Story Media Group

Climbing up one spot from 2021, the Toronto-based prodco boasts some impressive numbers: Its educational *Xavier Riddle's Museum Maker* game has hit more than seven million plays on the PBS KIDS Games app and website; digital initiatives based on *Karma's World* made more than 40 million impressions across all social media platforms; and the show's fourth-season trailer is nearing seven million views on YouTube. To date, 9 Story's in-house YouTube business spans 16 languages and has generated more than 14 billion lifetime views.



5



4

WildBrain Spark

The AVOD network has racked up a trillion minutes of YouTube watch time since 2016. With growth supported by classic IPs like Caillou and Teletubbies, WildBrain Spark also branched out with new partners and platforms. In 2022, the company teamed up with GameFam to break MGA Entertainment's *L.O.L. Surprise!* into the metaverse with a major Roblox campaign. It also joined Poland's Animation Café to co-produce the spinoff series *Sunny Bunnies Sing-Along* for YouTube.



6

LEGO Creative Play Lab

The LEGO Group last appeared in this category in 2017, ranking in the top three, but this is the first appearance for its Creative Play Lab (CPL) division. CPL earns the recognition thanks to its *LEGO City Missions* experience, which launched last summer. Accompanying the toy range is a downloadable *LEGO Builder* app that guides kids through the building process with an interactive animated story instead of the brand's usual paper instructions.



7

Aardman

The British animation studio makes a first-time appearance in the digital media category's top 10. Its popular stop-motion IPs, such as Morph and Shaun the Sheep, are building up strong YouTube viewership, with the latter's channel nearing 10 million subscribers. On the gaming end, Aardman is working with French virtual reality developer Atlas V on the first Wallace and Gromit VR experience, set to launch in 2023 on Meta's Oculus store.

Headspinner Productions

The indie prodco makes its Hot50 debut this year, thanks to rapid growth from a successful digital-first strategy to develop web-based content featuring YouTubers with big followings. And its 2D-animated series *Denis and Me* (based on YouTuber Denis Kopotun) has accumulated more than 27 million views since launching in September 2020. Next up, Headspinner is producing web series *Gisele's Mashup Adventures*, featuring an animated avatar of popular TVOKids preschool host Gisele Corinthios.

8





9

Cartoon Network

Cartoon Network powered up its Redraw Your World multiplatform content in 2022 with an inspirational drum-heavy rock anthem from teen music phenom Nandi Bushell that's nearing 6.5 million views on YouTube. The kidsnet also grew its eco-conscious Climate Champions social campaign to provide kids with more online tools and resources to combat climate change. The campaign partnered with student-focused initiative Climate Action Project to inspire kids with daily online and offline challenges to help protect the planet.

Spin Master

Not only has Spin Master entered the top 10 in digital media for the first time; it also made digital media history after Roblox rolled out a full season of its *Bakugan: Battle Planet* series—marking the first time a complete season of a TV series has been available to stream on the gaming platform. Spin Master also added six international PAW Patrol YouTube channels to its roster, and more than doubled its *Monster Jam Revved Up Recaps* views.

10





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The Spring International TV Market - 60th Anniversary

AN INSIDER'S GUIDE TO

Miami

FLORIDA



FOOD & DRINK

Ahi Sushi Bar
This small (actually tiny) sushi spot in the middle of Little Havana is perfect for those one-on-one dinners, and you'll be treated to a world-class omakase feast.

Byblos
A beautiful room and an amazing Eastern Mediterranean menu. Each dish is familiar, but it's the best version that you've ever had. Ideal for client dinners of four to six.

Garcia's Seafood Grille & Fish Market
There's an actual working fish market on the ground floor, but upstairs is a bar/restaurant that overlooks the river, serving impeccably fresh and tasty fish and seafood dishes.

Hutong
A great spot to host a fun client dinner for larger groups. The Northern Chinese cuisine is outstanding, especially the dim sum. The stunning architecture and an ever-changing light show enhance the experience.

Il Gabbiano
Hands down the best place for a client lunch at Kidscreen Summit. The food, service and setting are simply flawless. I highly recommend the grouper, a local fish known as "poor man's lobster."

ENTERTAINMENT

A Miami Heat game
The NBA team's home base, the FTX Arena, is just a stone's throw from the InterContinental, and there's usually a home game during Kidscreen Summit. It's a great night out with clients, friends, or both!

SoHo House
This location, right in the middle of South Beach, makes for a fun night of people-watching. If you're not a member, you can dine at Cecconi's Italian restaurant on the courtyard level.

CULTURE

Perez Art Museum Miami (PAMM)
The bayside grounds surrounding the museum are almost as beautiful as the modern and contemporary art contained inside. The Christo Drawings exhibit, on until June, is definitely worth a visit!

Everglades National Park
It's a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the largest subtropical wilderness in the US. It is so worth the trek, if you have time. The best way to see the Everglades is by airboat. There are crocodiles, panthers, manatees and so much more. You won't see anything like it anywhere else in the world.


Byblos


FTX Arena

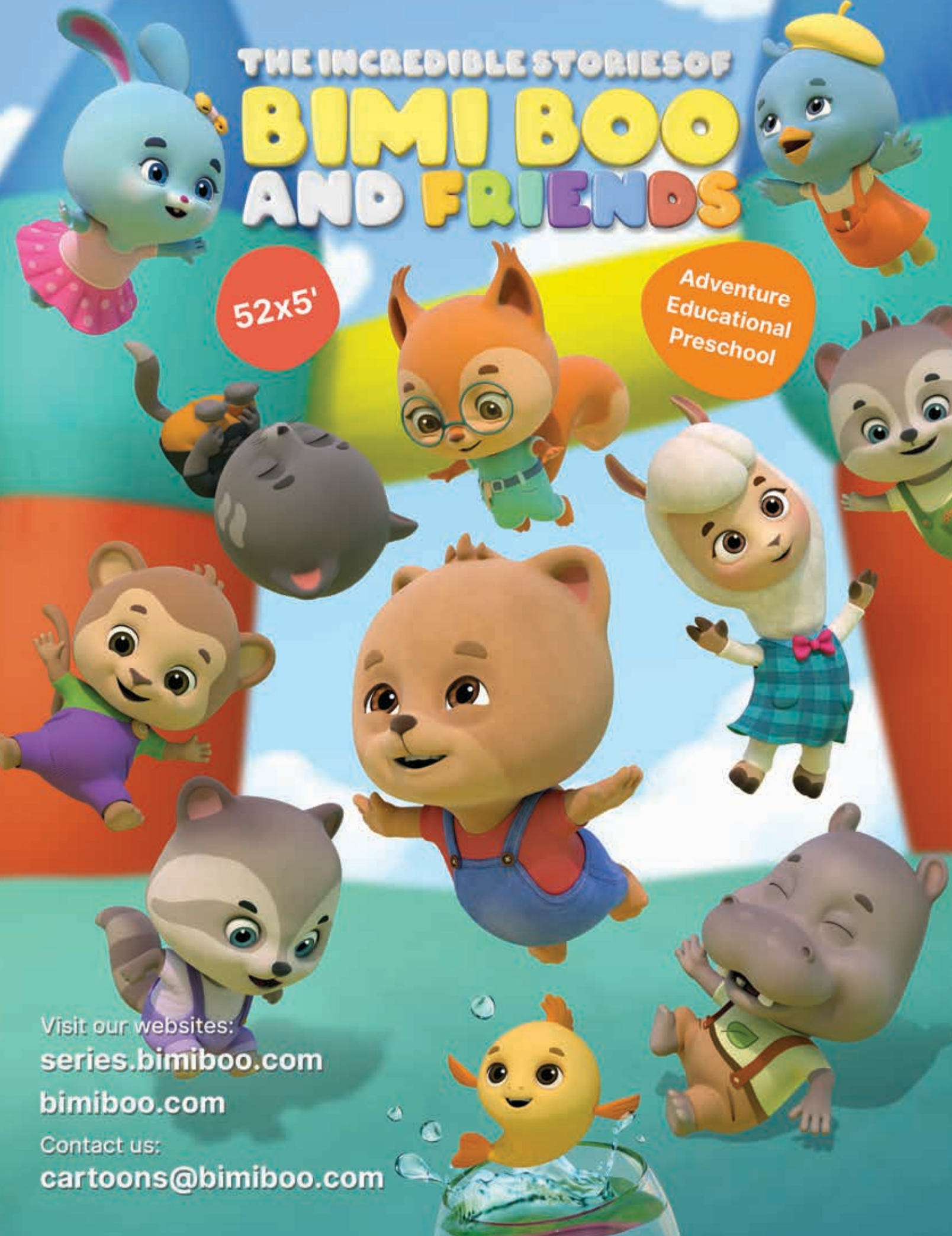
Photo: Wylepoon

INSIDER

Richard Goldsmith



Thunderbird Entertainment's global distribution and consumer products president has attended every edition of Kidscreen Summit in Miami. Richard's grandparents lived there when he was growing up, and he later worked in the city at Spanish media company Univision for several years. He has also spent time in the area on numerous business and family trips.


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